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CHRISTIAN EXHORTATION

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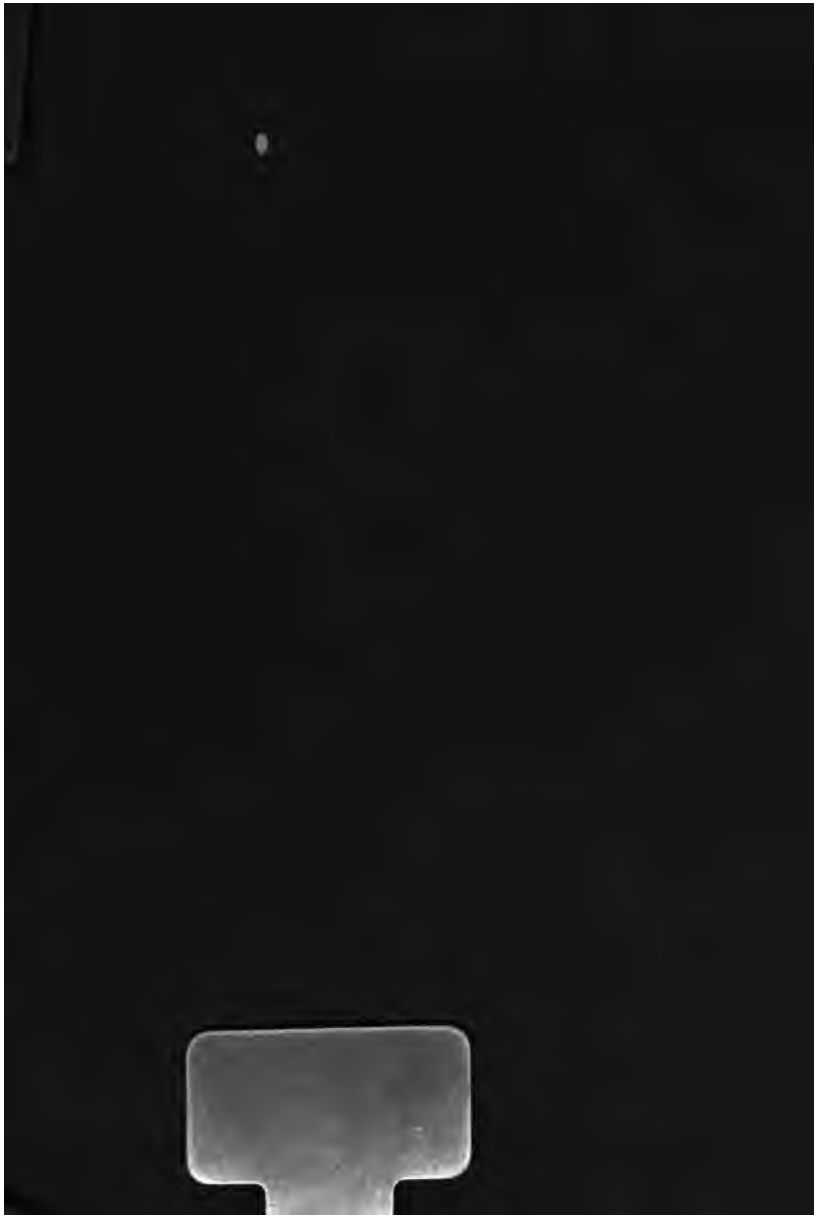

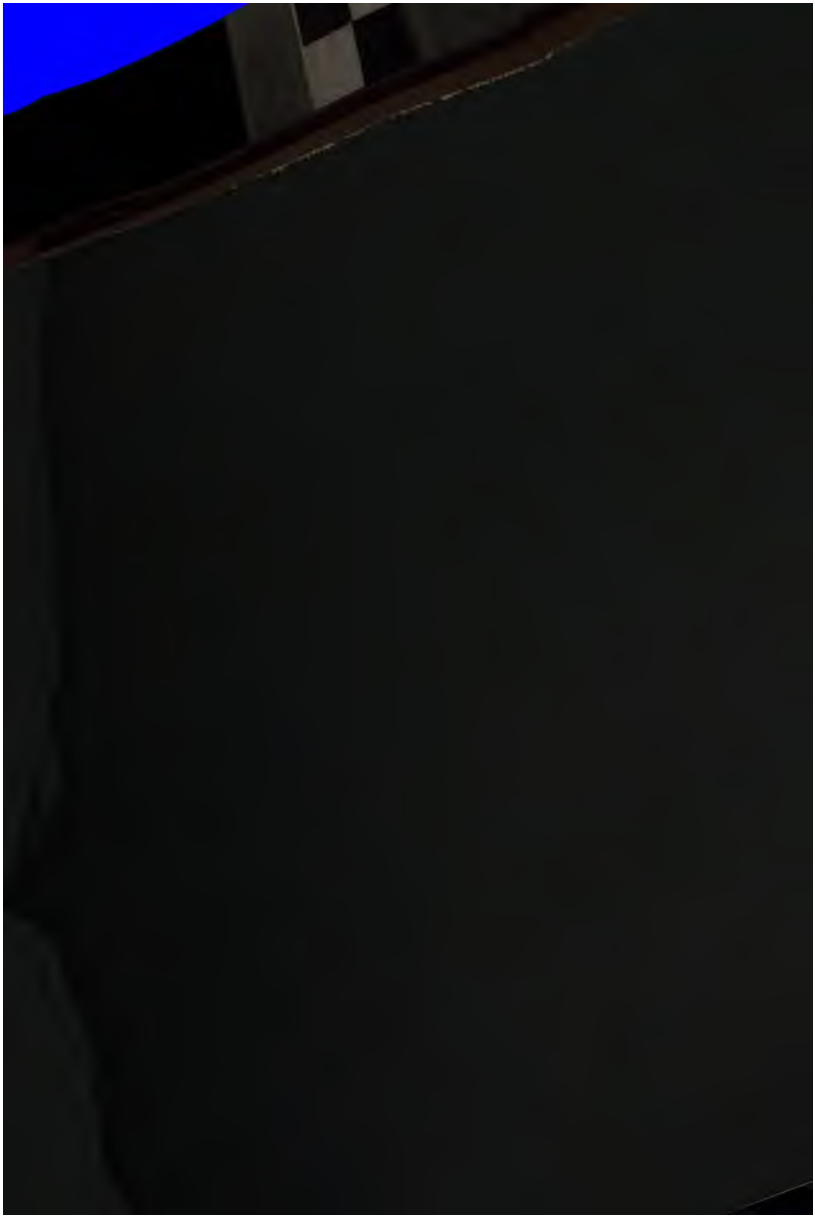

CHRISTIAN EXHORTATION.

CHRISTIAN EXHORTATION.

SERMONS

PREACHED IN COUNTRY CHURCHES.

BY

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SERMONS.

I.

THE NEW YEAR.

'Old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new.'—2 Cor. v. 17.

THE words in my text were spoken by St. Paul, with reference to the change which takes place in a man when from a heathen he becomes a Christian. 'If a man be in Christ,' a part and portion of His body, in full communion and fellowship with his Redeemer, 'he is a new creature;' so entirely changed for the better, that he is as it were remade, 'created' afresh 'in Christ Jesus unto good works.' 'Old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new.'

He has a new name given him in his baptism; he has new hopes, new aspirations; he is renewed in mind and in practice. He puts off the old man, which is corrupt, and puts on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness: in a word, is a new being; 'Old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new.'

And, brethren, it might be a most interesting task to follow up the Apostle's words, and trace the Christian thus renewed in all parts of his new existence, in all his behaviour and conversation in the world, and to set him before you, as we see him in the pages of the New Testament, for an example.

But to-day I would rather take the text simply for a handle on which to fasten a few remarks that seem to be called for by the present season.

For this is the first Sunday, and the first day, of the new year; and being such, it may well furnish food for religious thoughts, for sober and serious recollection, such as, I trust, may be of use to us—may in some measure help to that end for which the Psalmist prayed, when he said, 'O! teach us to number our days: that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!'

And first—'Old things are passed away!' There is something of sadness in the words, something sobering in the thought that another year is gone, that this especial year is gone. The year with which we were so familiar, whose date we have so often written; the year in which so many things of interest have happened unto us, in which we have each one of us surely tasted both of good and ill, of sorrow and of joy; the year which gave to some, and which took away from others, perhaps their most valued treasure; the year marked by

so many events, public as well as private; the year that will long be memorable for extreme of heat in summer, and extreme of cold in winter; which, above all, will be remembered as the year of the great foreign war—the year 1870 is ended! It passed away when the midnight bells ceased ringing suddenly. The old year is dead!

Yes, it is gone! gone with its burden of good, or ill, to join the departed years that went before it. It will return no more. It is part and parcel of the dreadful past, that past which cannot be undone, nor had over again, which must be accounted for at the judgment-seat of Christ.

In a few days we shall be familiar with the new comer, and cease to think or talk about the old year. Like as it often is—alas! too often—with departed friends, so will it be with the old year—out of sight, it will be out of mind. All our thoughts and cares will be with its successor. The old year, far more fully than we realize it at this moment, will 'have passed away!'

Now can this be right? Is it wise so soon to forget the past? A year, like a friend, might surely claim some decent space of regret in our mind. I would not have you, brethren, wipe away the record of it too quickly from your thoughts. And so on this Sunday—the first since the old year ended—the day on which the new year begins, I bid you stand silent a little while,

and meditate in your hearts on that which is now gone—the old year which has passed away!

Think, I would say, of the principal things that have happened to each of you in the last twelve months. What changes have taken place in your families? what changes in yourselves? Are you better, wiser, more masters of yourselves, more kind, more humble-minded, more considerate of others, less given to hasty words, and hasty tempers, more diligent in the discharge of your duty, more active in doing good, more liberal and free-handed than you were at the beginning of last year? In a word, are you more advanced in your Christian course—more really Christ's disciples, in habit, and conversation, in faith, and purity, than you were a twelvemonth ago?

Such questions we should all put to ourselves at this moment. We should try and examine ourselves, brethren, and if need be, judge and condemn ourselves, that we may not hereafter be judged and condemned of the Lord.

Then once again let me say it, while the old year is but just gone, call back the things that have been done in it, which have befallen you, and by which you have been chiefly affected.

Call back, and consider what your religious opportunities have been, and how you have used them. Of the fifty-two Sundays that are gone, how many of them have found you worshipping

devoutly and reverently in God's house of prayer? Of the invitations to the Holy Communion which have been given you from time to time in this church, how many have you thankfully received and used? Call to mind these and other means of grace which God has given you in the last year—the wise counsels of godly friends, the words spoken to you in season, the words of your minister spoken to you in this place, the words of God which you have heard in the Scriptures, the many chapters of the Bible you have read; call these now to mind—these and many other signs of God's seeking care and love—the many tokens that He would have you live, and not die—and ask yourselves, ask each of himself, How have I profited by these things? Have I grown by the use of them, or have I not grown, in grace and in the knowledge of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

Again, call to mind God's mercies in the past year,—His temporal, and spiritual mercies. Think how He has blessed you with health! Think how He has recovered you from sickness! Think how He has made you to prosper, in your farm, in your trade, in whatsoever you have put your hand to!

Yes, call to mind God's mercies!—mercies to us as individuals, mercies to us as a nation. If ever a people had cause to be thankful to Almighty God for His goodness it is ourselves. Peace in our borders—plenty in our storehouses and barns

—little or no interruption of work in our busy seats of industry—the great mass of our population fully employed—increased care and thought for the education of the young—the knitting together of all ranks and conditions more and more in bonds of mutual interest and service—these are blessings which affect us at large, and which ought at large to be recognised, and acknowledged.

The past year, as it fades to our view, seems to speak this as its last word, to all who dwell in our favoured land—'Be ye thankful!'

Surely those words must find an echo in our hearts. 'Surely we shall feel that for all the mercies extended to us by God, for all the marks of His Fatherly love and care, for the many proofs we have that He watches over our land, that His eyes are on it from the beginning to the end of the year, there is due to Him at our hands the heartiest and most reverential acknowledgment. Surely we shall wish to show ourselves grateful by coming into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise, by speaking to one another of His merciful dealings towards us, and by provoking one another, in every possible way, to that service of love and good works which we know to be ever in His sight the most acceptable service we can offer.

So far of the past, of the old year which is gone. While yet we stand on the threshold of the

new, our duty is to recall what has been done, and what has been left undone by us in the time that is past, to count over God's mercies, and our own failings, and that with a view to our improvement; that in the year to come, if God spares us, we may strive to correct what we find to be amiss, and make haste and redeem the time, and live henceforth as men ought to live who are the receivers of so many blessings, — blessings of health, blessings of wealth, blessings of peace, blessings of preservation, and above all, the inestimable blessing of Redemption!

'Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.'

Yes, 'all things are become new.' A new date in the almanack, a new starting-point for our course; the beginning of one more of those threescore and ten periods which round the life of man!

I have said there is something saddening at the first entering into a new year. But there is also something cheering, and we are right in the wish with which we greet one another—and let me give you that greeting now from this place,—of a happy new year!

Happy, indeed, may it prove to us! Happy in the best sense of the word, by being a year in which we shall fall into no deadly sin, in which we shall make some progress in the path of a Christian life, in which, when it is ended, we shall

not have to look back with sorrow and regret for the things done in it, for the things we have neglected to do in it. May the year before us be happy for this. And to make it so, let us see that we set God ever before us; that we think of Him when we awake, and of Him when we lie down to rest; and pray Him, each day, to be with us in our going out, and in our coming in; to bless, preserve, and keep us; to set our feet firm upon the Rock, and to order our goings!

That, believe me, is the secret of a happy year, when we spend it in a religious, God-fearing spirit; when, wherever we are, whatever we do, we remember and forget not the Lord our God!

Oh, if I could bring you all so to live! Oh, that we would all resolve to honour God more than we have yet done by prayer in our chamber, prayer with our families, as well as by our weekly meeting together in the Lord's house for His public worship; never being absent, save from illness, or some grave cause. For then, I feel that we should spend this new year happily; that come what might — sorrow, loss, sickness, in the months that are before us, we should not be left uncomforted, without the support of our God; we should have an anchor for our soul sure and stedfast!

I have somewhere read of a man, who, though a religious, well-living man, was greatly afraid of death, and of that which must follow death, the

Judgment. And how did he get free from fear? Not as the careless and worldly do, by dismissing the thought of death, but by habituating his mind to the contemplation of it. His custom was to consider each evening as the close of his life, and the darkness of the night as the time of death, and his bed as his grave. He composed himself for one as he would have done for the other. On retiring to rest he fell on his knees, confessed his sins, and entreated God's forgiveness, and renewed his faith in the mercies of God as shown to us in Christ Jesus. He then committed his soul into the hands of his Creator and Redeemer as one who might awake in another world. After which he laid him down and slept, as one whose mind was at ease, no more tormented with the fear of death, at peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

And this is what I would recommend to you, brethren — this habit of approaching God with lowly confession of sin, and prayer for forgiveness at the close of each day you live. There is no practice which will help more to keep you from any great offence — no practice better fitted to promote your happiness, both in time and in eternity.

Once more let me repeat to you the text:—

'Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.'

I said there was something cheering at the beginning of a new year.

And so indeed there is; for God now gives us a fresh page of the book of our life. As yet no blot, no stain, no disfigurement, appears upon it. May we keep it so to the end! May the leaf of the new year, when it is filled and ready to be turned, be the record of an amended life!—a witness not against us, but for us in the day of reckoning before our God!

The past cannot be undone, but it may be made harmless to hurt us. We must not let it clog our foot, so as to hinder our running with a good heart in the race that is before us. God has been very merciful to us in giving us a new start. God will never taunt us, as we often taunt one another with former failures, if we will only make a good use of the present opportunity.

When a man repents — really and heartily repents — God buries the past.

And we too, brethren, may bury the past — aye, bury it out of our sight, with all its shame, all its misery, all its guilt; but on this condition, that we rise, as it were, on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher and better things; that we shake ourselves free — as, God helping us, we may do — from the entangling cord of our besetting sin — that we break altogether with the past — no longer

live the rest of our time in the flesh, to the lusts of man, but to the will of God—that, being made free from sin, we become the servants of righteousness, and walk henceforth, and ever afterwards, in newness of life!

II.

SIGHT RESTORED.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

'What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.'—Luke, xviii. 41.

THERE is much instruction provided for us in the Gospel for this Sunday. The part of it to which I would now call your attention is contained in the last nine verses, which I will at once proceed to read again, and point out what seem to be the chief lessons for us to gain from this Scripture.

'And it came to pass that as He was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the wayside begging.'

This blind man sat by the wayside, as beggars are accustomed to do, to attract the notice and pity of the passers-by. His name, St. Mark tells us, was Bartimæus, or the son of Timæus, by which we gather that he was a well-known person, familiar to all who frequented the town,—the blind beggar by Jericho.

He sat by the wayside, in his usual place, when, on a certain day, to his infinite benefit, our Lord approached the town. Jesus was not alone: with Him were His twelve apostles and a great con-

course of people. The tramp of their feet, the hum of their talk, caught the quick ear of the blind man. 'Hearing the multitude, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.' When he heard this, he began to cry out, saying, 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Notice it, brethren: we say the same words at the end of our Litany, 'O Son of David, have mercy upon us!' And that cry out of the blind man's mouth was a cry of real faith and earnestness. He had heard of the Lord's mighty cures,—what He did for those who were diseased,—of His healing the leper, of His making the lame to walk, of His giving sight to the blind; and he hoped to receive help himself from that gracious hand: so he cried—not doubtingly, not faintly, but loudly and earnestly—'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!'

The people about our Lord did not like the interruption. They were thinking of their own wants, their own sicknesses and infirmities, their own need of a healer; and they desired, it may be, to keep Christ all to themselves: and so they rebuked the blind man, that he should hold his peace. But no: his need was great, his confidence in the Lord's power to help was great; and, instead of holding his tongue, 'he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!'

We, you know, do the same: we not only employ the very words of the blind man's prayer in our Litany, but we imitate him in our repetition of that prayer: 'Graciously hear us, O Christ! graciously hear us, O Lord Christ!'

At his continual crying the Lord halted. He stood still, and commanded the man to be brought to Him. Whereupon the multitude, who so lately rebuked him, now have a word of cheer for him: 'Be of good comfort: rise, He calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment (for quicker despatch), rose and came to Jesus. And when He was come near, He asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?' The man replied at once, as knowing well what he wanted, 'Lord, that I may receive my sight. Jesus saith unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee;' or, as in St. Mark, 'thy faith hath made thee whole.' 'And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.'

Such is the account of the healing of the blind man—or if we follow St. Matthew's record—of the two blind men near the gate of Jericho. Let us look now for some lessons in it suitable to our own use, and such as may seem to have been intended in it for our learning.

These, I think, are chiefly two:—

I. Upon perseverance in prayer.

II. Upon the importance of direct particular prayer, *i. e.*, prayer in which we name our several wants; the fault for which we need God's pardon; the infirmity for which we need His strength and support.

And, first, of perseverance in prayer.

Our Lord in the Gospel has spoken a parable to teach us this lesson, 'that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.' The widow in that parable gained her end by her importunity, by her continual asking. The blind man in the account we have read to-day gained his end, got the desired relief by the same means—by continued asking. The multitude, we have seen, tried to silence him, but in vain; 'he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' Yes, he obtained his object; he was brought out of darkness into light, because he had strength to persevere in seeking it, because nothing daunted by the discouraging rebuke of the crowd about him, he kept on crying to Christ to succour him.

Think of him often, brethren, and think of him as an example. Be not soon weary; be not soon discouraged in your prayer to God for true enlightenment. Put yourselves in the way where Jesus may be expected to pass by; come together to the place where prayer is wont to be made; where when two or three gather together in His Name, He has promised to be present, and to

grant their requests. Pray the Father through the Son to have mercy upon you. Pray to that Son in His own name, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on me!' Do not, if at the first He seem not to hear, give up asking. Do not be discouraged if at first you get no comfort from your prayers. The answer will come if you only continue knocking. The commandment is, 'Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find.' But it is not said, Ask only once, or, Seek only once, and ye shall have your request. No promise is made to cold, and unfrequent prayer. The promise is to the prayer of faith, to the prayer of earnestness, to the prayer that will take no denial, that in the face of obstacles perseveres to put up its petition.

Let such be our prayers—earnest, heartfelt, often repeated. The prayers of men who will not let God go unless He bless them! For then, doubt it not, we shall prevail, even as did that blind man by Jericho. The Lord marked his earnestness; marked his determination; marked his faith, triumphant under difficulties. 'And when He was come near He asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; thy faith have saved thee.'

That is the first lesson of this miracle, to persevere in prayer. And the second is to be par-

ticular, direct, plain-spoken in our prayer. When the blind man, led by the hand of his friend, was placed at the feet of Christ, and the question was put to him, 'What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?' He answered at once, and without hesitation, 'Lord, that I may receive my sight.' He did not say in a vague general way, 'Lord, bless me,' or 'Lord, have mercy upon me;' but he mentioned where, in what particular, he needed the Lord's help: 'Lord, that I may receive my sight.' He was blind, and to be healed of his blindness was the wish uppermost in his heart; and out it came in clear direct speech, 'Lord, that I may receive my sight!'

Now, here again the blind man sets us an example. He is, we have seen, an example to us of earnestness and perseverance in prayer; and he is also an example to us of directness in prayer, of asking from God the boon we want in a plain, outspoken way.

And this, too, is a very useful thing for us to learn, not only to cry out to God in a general way, and say, as we do, that we are *sinners*, that we have erred and strayed from His ways like lost sheep; but to specify our error, to name each particular fault for which we need God's pardon, to put our fingers on the wounded spot, to ask for healing when we know we are infirm and in need of healing. 'Lord, that I may receive my sight!' Lord,

pardon this particular sin that Thou knowest me to have done! Lord, giv eme grace to stand against that particular temptation to which Thou knowest I am inclined! As, for instance, a man given to drink, and aware of his infirmity, and wishing to get the better of it, will do well to make that the subject of particular prayer. He will ask God to make him a sober, temperate man.

Another who has been tempted to dishonesty, to cheat or to defraud his neighbour, will pray God that he may be kept upright; may have clean hands and an honest heart; may be true and just in all his dealings.

Another, whose fault is bad language, a readiness to swear, and take God's holy Name in vain, will, if he wishes to be cured of his fault, pray heartily for grace to put the rein upon his tongue, to bear in mind his Lord's solemn charge, 'Swear not at all; but let your communication be, Yea, yea: Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.'

And so in all cases, whatever be our particular weakness, the sin that does most easily beset us—if we would conquer that sin, if we would kill it before it kills us, soul and body in hell, we must make it the subject of *particular* prayer.

This, surely, is the second great lesson of the miracle before us.

Bear it in mind when you pray, as I trust you

do, or ever you lie down to sleep, or rise up in the morning. When you pray, let your prayer be *particular, direct, plain, open.* Hide not from God your besetting sin. Mention it by name. Say to Him when, and where, and how, you have done wrong.

Such prayers are, I grant it, very humbling; for the very mention of our particular sin brings that sin back to us in all its guilt, and abases us to the dust for having done it.

But then such prayers are also very healing; because it is when we are brought low, and humbled, possessed with a sense of our sin; it is then that we are best fitted to accept the tidings of a Saviour from the guilt and power of our sin. It is then that we cling to the cross of Christ, as it were, with both hands. It is then that God's promises to the penitent—promises sown thick throughout the Bible—come home to us with a living force. It is then that such words as these drop upon our contrite hearts as real balm, 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous, and He is the Propitiation for our sins.'

III.

BETHESDA.

'And a certain man was there which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.'—St. John, v. 5.

THE miracle at Bethesda has been read in the second lesson for this service, and it is a miracle that offers many points for our consideration. In the person cured; in the length of his malady; in the day on which the cure was done; in the comment on it by the Jews—their carping words, 'It is the Sabbath day; it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed;' in the answer of our Lord, 'My Father worketh hitherto,' on the Sabbath as well as other days, 'and I work;' in the warning to the healed man, when his Healer met him shortly afterwards in the Temple, 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee'—in all these particulars how much is there for our learning! how much that is fitted to confirm our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and draw our hearts to love and follow Him!

Let us then return to the account which we have already heard out of the fifth chapter of St. John's Gospel. We read at its opening that 'there

was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to it to Jerusalem.' We cannot say with certainty what the feast was; but probably it was the Feast of Purim, which fell about the month of March. 'Now at Jerusalem there is by the sheep-market a pool which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda'—the house of mercy—having five porches. These five porches or porticoes were built to shelter the various classes of sick persons who sought the pool for its healing properties. 'For an angel,' we read, 'went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.' We need not suppose that an angel visibly descended from heaven, for this is not asserted in the narrative; but that at a certain period of the day the water in the pool was moved, whether by an intermittent spring or from some other cause, and that on its being moved it was endued with healing power. Further it would seem that this healing power was not of long duration, that its virtue was soon exhausted, that only the first who got down into the water after it was troubled derived benefit from it. Among the crowd of expectant sick folk was a poor cripple 'which had an infirmity thirty and eight years!' He was totally helpless, and from the length of his ailment must almost have ceased to hope for relief. But on this day relief was at hand. 'Jesus saw

him lie;' Jesus 'knew that he had been now a long time in that case; and He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?' The impotent man answers Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.' The man had faith equal to the occasion; he believed the word that Jesus spake to him; he tried to do as he was ordered—tried in faith, nothing doubting—and he succeeded. Cure came with the effort to obey Christ. 'Immediately he was made whole, and took up his bed'—the rug or mattress on which he had lain—'and walked.' And on the same day was the Sabbath. 'The Jews, therefore, said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath-day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.' The man answered them—and it was an admirable answer,—'He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk.'

The Pharisees, on this, turn their wrath from the man who was miraculously healed upon Him by whom the miracle was wrought: 'What man is he which said unto thee, Take up thy bed and walk?' Observe, they do not say, 'What man is he that healed thee?'—that would have been to allow Christ's great power—but, 'What man is he which said unto thee, Take up thy bed and walk?'

At first no answer was given. The man that was healed did not yet know his benefactor. But shortly after, having met with our Lord in the Temple, he gave the desired information: he 'went and told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him whole; and therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath-day.'

I pass over our Lord's defence of what He had done, as being beyond our subject, and will proceed to mark some of the points intended in the narrative for our instruction.

And first I would say, Behold in the miracle the mighty power of Jesus Christ! Without any effort, without any delay, by the single utterance of His will, He made the impotent man whole: 'Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked.'

And next let us notice the person on whom this mighty cure was done: he was a man 'who had an infirmity thirty and eight years!' No doubt in that group, that great multitude of sick folk who crowded the porches of Bethesda, there were many sad cases of infirmity, many blind, many halt and withered, waiting for the healing effect of the waters. But there could hardly have been any one so heavily afflicted as was this poor man. And because he was so heavily afflicted,

because the Lord 'knew' that he had been now a long time in this case,' He singled him out from the rest to be the recipient of His mercy. He did it, we believe, with a purpose: He did it for the hope and comfort of afflicted souls who should come after. Henceforth, however bad our case may be—of however long standing, however inveterate—we need not despair of finding relief—relief in Jesus Christ.

Yes: though our case be in the eyes of others hopeless, it is not so in the eyes of our merciful Saviour. He sees us lie, He knows our misery, and He can bring relief.

And, further, observe in what way that relief may come. How did Christ heal the impotent man at Bethesda? What was the medicine He employed, the means of cure? It was very simple. All He said to him was, 'Wilt thou be made whole?' Do you indeed wish to be healed? Think of that question, and think of it as put to yourselves. The Saviour asks it of every soul labouring under the sickness of sin. He asks it of those most especially who have lain the longest in that evil case,—'Wilt thou be made whole?' Dost thou indeed wish to break the cord of thy besetting sin? Dost thou from thy heart desire to be loosed from thine infirmity—to be once more a free man, no longer tied and fettered by the chain of evil habit? 'Wilt thou be made whole?'

That is His question, and who would not answer, 'Lord, I do wish! Lord, I desire above all things to be set free from my sin! If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on me and help me!' Where there is this earnest desire to be delivered, this faith in Christ's power to take away sin, this casting ourselves wholly upon His mercy, there surely will the cure be wrought—there again will the Great Healer do His mighty work, and break the power of sin and Satan over the soul of his long-detained prisoner. Aye, though he be a prisoner like the one in the Gospel, held captive by an 'infirmity of thirty and eight years!'

I refer again to this point in the miracle, as the one most rich in instruction, most rich in consolation for us, 'A certain man was there which had an infirmity thirty and eight years!' Surely it has been recorded for our learning. Surely this instance of a man made whole after an infirmity of more than half a lifetime, made whole by coming under the notice of Jesus Christ, deserves to be read, marked, and remembered. Surely it forbids us to say of any case of human infirmity that it is incurable. Surely it opens a door of hope where, but for such opening, hope were not! Thirty and eight years is a long time for a soul to be tied and bound by the chain of sin! Thirty and eight years is a long time for a man to go on provoking God! Thirty and eight years to be a Sabbath-

breaker! Thirty and eight years to be in the habit of constantly taking God's holy Name in vain! or to be for all that time in the habit of drinking over much! or to be of an impure and unclean life! or to be habitually a transgressor of any of God's holy commandments for thirty and eight years, is indeed to be in a very perilous condition! You would say that there is small hope of improvement or change for the better in such a person. And it may be so. There is small hope of change for the better in such cases. The longer we go on in any evil way the harder it is to leave it. The longer we indulge in any sinful habit the harder it is to break off our sin. Still let us not, with this miracle before us, say that it is impossible. Let us not put any limit to the grace and power of our God. He can raise us up, however long we may have lain dead in trespasses and sin. He can raise us to the life of righteousness. He can touch and turn the heart of the hardest amongst us, and make it soft with godly sorrow. He can, in His own way and hour, strike into the careless soul a sense of its danger, and bring forth from the conscience-smitten sinner the cry, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'

I think, then, we may gather from the cure of this poor, long-afflicted man hope for cases which would else appear desperate. I think one chief lesson for us here is, not to despair utterly and

entirely for ourselves or for others—not while life remains, to give up a single soul as lost.

True, we must be careful not to presume upon God's forbearance. No man who has gone on for long years in his provocation can reckon on being stopped and changed in time. All I say is, that such a change is not beyond the bounds of possibility. In the worst and most hardened characters there are some seeds of a better life. No man, however habitually careless and irreligious, is without some better moments, some compunctious visitings, some wish to change, some resolve to amend. The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, can make its way through every hindrance. The voice that said to the poor impotent at Bethesda, 'Rise and walk!' can pierce the dullest ear, and that with a power not to be withstood. 'Awake, thou sleeper, and call upon thy God that thou perish not!'

There is yet one other point on which I would touch before concluding, and that is the warning speech of our Lord to the man on whom He had wrought this miraculous cure. 'Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.' A worse thing than that out of which he had been delivered! A worse thing than an infirmity of thirty and eight years! It must, indeed, have been a very terrible

punishment which our Lord had in his mind when He so spake! He seems to refer to the sufferings of a future world, to their awful condition who shall be condemned in the day of Judgment. Or it may be, He points to that hardening of the sinner's heart which follows on repeated sin, and which makes it almost impossible for him truly to repent, and therefore impossible for him to be saved.

Whichever way we interpret the words, they are words of deep and solemn meaning: words that warn us against sliding back, which put before us, in the strongest way, the danger of trifling with an old sin, going and committing it afresh after we have once repented of it and been forgiven.

Let us carry home that warning, and lay it up deep in our hearts, and if at any time we find ourselves thinking lightly of sin; if some old temptation rises up and entices us to do again what we once did, and for which, as we thought, we had heartily repented; if we find ourselves, I say, on the point of some old fall, some sin from which, by God's grace, we had been delivered, O then, let us recall these words of our Saviour, of Him Who has dealt so lovingly with us, Who has had pity on us, and healed us, and forgiven us our past great transgressions, let us recall His words of warning which we have heard to-day — words of warning which He speaks not to that one healed

man at Bethesda only, but to all on whom He has done His cure, to whom He has remitted sin, 'Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee!'

IV.

THE FLOOD, THE ARK, AND THE RAINBOW.

'And God said . . . I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud.'—Gen. ix. 12, 13, 14.

WE read last Sunday the account of the wickedness of man which caused the Flood. We read of him whom alone God found just and upright in the midst of that wicked generation, even Noah; and of the manner in which God provided for his safety when He drowned the world. And to-day, in the first lesson, we have read of God's blessing Noah on his coming out of the Ark — blessing him with the blessing of our first parents—'be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth;' giving to him and to his descendants the earth with its riches for a possession, sealing to him by a second promise the dominion over all flesh, and finally establishing His covenant by a token, to this day continually renewed, the token of the Rainbow, as a sign that He would never more destroy the earth by a flood.

Much there is here for our instruction—much in what is told us of Noah—of the Flood—of the covenant made with Noah afterwards—of which the rainbow was to be the sign and seal.

And first of Noah. He is mentioned in both Testaments, and with every mark of God's approval. In him we have a type of One far greater—even of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus Noah was 'a preacher of righteousness' to a wicked world, warning them to flee from the wrath to come. Aye! and warning them in vain! And so was our Lord 'a preacher of righteousness' to the unbelieving Jews. How often did He yearn to gather them together 'safe under His feathers, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, but they would not!' They knew not the time of their visitation!

Again, it is said of Noah, that 'he was a just man and perfect in his generation,' and that he 'found grace in the eyes of the Lord.' But with how much greater force may this be said of Jesus Christ. Of whom but of Him, Who was sinless, holy, harmless, undefiled, can it be said without any qualifying restricting word, that He was just and perfect? Of whom but of Him, that He was the Beloved of the Father, full of grace and truth?

But, apart from his being a type and shadow of our Lord, how much is there in Noah himself that may serve us for an example. Living as he did

in a most wicked age, while all around had cast off the restraint of religion, Noah was true to his God. Amid the faithless he was found faithful; amid the scoffers he remained devout; amidst a people given up to every carnal lust and license, he kept himself pure; lived a sober, temperate, God-fearing life. And in all this he is our pattern. In him we may see how to walk and please God. He is an example of trust, of faith, of holy living; of a man who in all his ways—by what he said, and still more by what he did—remembered God; and who reaped the fruit of it. He 'found grace in the eyes of the Lord;' he was saved and delivered by a mighty deliverance; he and his whole house, in the day when God punished the wickedness of mankind by bringing in the flood upon the ungodly!

So far I have spoken of Noah, and of the use of his example. Let us next look at the flood, which is inseparable from his name, Noah's Flood.

We all know the main facts of that occurrence. We are all from our childhood familiar with the story of the Deluge, and of that Ark of deliverance which Noah, inspired of God, built; and in which he and the creatures that were with him were saved. We all, too, are familiar with a sight which, it would appear, was first witnessed by Noah after the subsiding of the waters, the Rainbow. And we have heard again to-day, in the

first lesson, the great words which give to each recurrence of that beautiful phenomenon such interest for ourselves and for all men: 'This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations. Behold, I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud. . . . And I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.'

And what are the lessons of this knowledge—of Noah's Flood, and Noah's Ark, and Noah's Rainbow? They are not far to find. They are plain for plain men to see. The lesson of the flood is God's hatred of sin. He 'spared not the old world.' No, though His own hands had made it, He spared it not, when the creature whom He had made, and to whom He had given dominion, 'had corrupted His way upon the earth.'

That stands out before all other lessons, as the great lesson of the flood. God will not pass by iniquity! God will surely punish! And side by side with this stands another lesson, the lesson of the Ark. And what shall I say that is? Why, that God is a deliverer, that He knows how to

rescue His true and faithful few out of the midst of a general ruin.

That Ark is an apt type of Christ's Church, and is used as such in our baptismal service. There, in that Church—in communion and fellowship with Jesus Christ, a communion and fellowship into which we are admitted at our baptism—there is a refuge for us against the storm; there is deliverance; there is safety!

You and I, and all who name the name of Christ, who profess and call ourselves Christians, have been admitted into that Ark of Refuge. We have been called in Jesus Christ, and placed in a state of salvation. We have not to wait; we have received the call. Aye, quite from our cradle we have been made partakers of the grace of our God! May He grant us ever fresh supplies of that grace, that we may continue His for ever, and daily increase in His Holy Spirit more and more, till we come to His everlasting kingdom!

Think, I beseech you, brethren, what a great blessing and privilege it is to have been born of Christian parents; to have been made Christians yourselves from your earliest years. Do not make light of that blessing. Do not undervalue your privileges as Christians. Let men say what they will, they cannot alter the fact that you have obtained mercy, that you have already been deli-

vered from the wrath of God, and received into the ark of Christ's Church.

In that church, I have said there is safety,—but not for all—not for the careless—not for the presumptuous—not for those who are at no pains to make their calling and election sure. No; but safety for these—for all who, mindful of the terms on which they were admitted into the Ark, study to make good their promise—renounce those things which are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same. There is sure and final salvation for all these. Sailing with Jesus with them in the ship—and He has said, 'I will never leave you'—steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, rooted in charity, they shall so pass the waves of this troublesome world that finally they may come to the land of everlasting life, there to be with Him, their Saviour, world without end!

Lastly, what is the lesson of the Rainbow? It is a lesson of hope. It tells of a sun behind the cloud. 'Your light affliction,' it seems to say, 'is but for a moment!' Soon will the trouble pass; soon will the face of your Father shine upon you! 'I do set my bow in the clouds, and it shall come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud!'

Surely there is a great spiritual lesson for us in this. Surely that beautiful sight, so familiar to us,

is in very deed, as even the heathen of old imagined, a messenger of God to man—a messenger and a reminder of His love.

In itself—apart from any moral teaching—it must always strike us as a thing of beauty and a work of power. 'Look,' writes the son of Sirach, 'look upon the Rainbow! and praise Him that made it; very beautiful is it in the brightness thereof. It compasseth the heaven about with a glorious circle; and the hands of the Most High have bended it!'

Yes! it is a thing of beauty: a witness to the wonder-working power of God. But I would have you regard it as something more—as a sign of God's forgiveness—a token of His covenant of peace. If the Flood proclaims God's wrath—His just wrath because of sin—let the Rainbow assure us of His mercy!

In it let us delight to read a Gospel of good tidings—an ever-fresh renewal of His promise to spare and not destroy men's lives—'For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made!'—Isa. lvii.

Yes; and the Rainbow—which we read of first in Genesis, at the opening of the Bible—appears again in the last book of the Bible, the book of the Revelation. And there it is seen encompassing the very seat of the Supreme Deity. 'There was

a Rainbow round the Throne, like unto an emerald!'

And this is very significant. For thus there is cast over the whole volume of the Holy Scripture, over all the record of God's dealings with man, the light and glory of redeeming love. Thus are we shown that the God of the Bible is a God in Whom we may trust—to Whom we may draw near—a God true to His promise, mindful of His covenant—a God who, as He has many names and many attributes, so does He rejoice most of all in this—that He is a God of Mercy!

This—believe me—this is His Name for ever! this is His memorial to a thousand generations—thus would He be proclaimed throughout all the world from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof—'The Lord God, ready to pardon, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth!'

V.

LUST, SIN, AND DEATH.

'Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.'—St. Jam. i. 15.

WE have the first and most striking illustration of the truth of these words in the lesson we have heard to-day, the third chapter of Genesis. There, in the example of our first parents, we see the sad consequences of lust or evil desire. 'Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.'

I shall propose that we keep our minds fixed for a few minutes on the Fall, man's shameful fall, as it is called in the heading of this third chapter: and notice how often that sad history is repeated in our own and our fellow-creatures' lives—how true it still is, and how fraught with warning, that lust is the mother of sin, and that sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death!

And first, of the Fall; what was it? What brought it about? Adam and Eve had been made good, 'sufficient to have stood;' what, then, caused their fall? You will say, the tempter, the devil:

and so, no doubt, he did. 'The woman being deceived was in the transgression.' But how came she to be deceived? Because she listened to his crafty wiles; because she had in her that which seconded his temptation, a craving for what had been forbidden her, a longing to taste the withheld fruit: in other words, lust; natural desire for forbidden bodily gratification. And that lust, instead of being controlled, checked, kept under, was allowed to have its course. 'When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eye, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit.' Aye, though God had plainly forbidden it, and under a terrible penalty, 'Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it lest ye die:' in spite of this warning—a warning she remembered and quoted at the very moment of the temptation—passion was too strong for her—'she put forth her hand, and took of the fruit, and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.'

That is the Bible account of the fall. So did lust, in our first parents, conceive and bring forth sin! So did evil desire break through the restraint of God's holy law, and introduce sin into the world and all our woe!

For note how true the latter part of the text is; how exemplified in the fall of our first parents; 'Sin when it is finished brought forth death.'

No sooner was the deed done, the sin sinned, but the penalty began to be inflicted. 'Their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked.' They knew that their innocence was gone; that they were not fit to stand before God. 'And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said'—with the cowardice that accompanies transgression—'The woman that thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field: upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. . . . And unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception: in sorrow thou shalt

bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'

There we read the penalty of sin; a life of sorrow, suffering, and labour, closed by the doom of death: man shut out from any earthly paradise, and forced for his very subsistence to go forth to his work and to his labour till the evening: man that had been made in his Maker's likeness, innocent and happy, with no limit to his being, now curtailed of that happiness, with the sentence of death in himself; with this word gone forth against him, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return!'

Verily, as I said, we may see in this which befell our first parents the closest application of the Apostle's words, 'Lust when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death!'

But next let us notice the truth of this Scripture in ourselves.

Eve is the mother of us all, and Eve's temptation and Eve's fall are repeated again and again in us, her children.

We, like her, lust after the forbidden fruit; we desire to have what is not good for us to have. There is in us, derived from her and Adam, original or birth-sin, a natural liking for and yearning after what God has forbidden us. 'The flesh,' our bodily appetite, 'lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit,' our higher nature, 'against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.'

Even that good and spiritually-minded man, St. Paul, felt this to be the case with himself. He says, 'In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: the good that I would, I do not; the evil that I would not, that I do. . . . With my mind I serve the law of God, but with my flesh the law of sin!'

And, I ask, is not this the experience of every one? Are we not conscious of a war going on in our hearts between duty and inclination? Do we not find ourselves drawn two ways, and, alas! too often drawn into the wrong way against our better mind? Is not this which happened to Eve a true account of what happens to ourselves? We are tempted of the devil to break some one of God's

holy commandments; we know it is wrong; we hear God's voice bidding us not do it; we know it to be His voice; we know that God hath said, 'Thou shalt not do it,' and yet such is our inborn sinfulness, such is the strength of evil desire, that we put aside God's warning, and do as Satan tempts us, and put forth our hand and take of the forbidden fruit and eat. 'Lust, when it has conceived, bringeth forth sin.'

That is the way in which Eve's sad story is repeated in us, her children—repeated, alas! continually. There are the same parties—weak human nature, and our strong adversary the devil; and there is the same struggle—a battle, as it were, between God's voice or conscience, 'Thou shalt not eat of it,' and the voice of the tempter, 'Ye shall not surely die.' And, as I have said, in how many cases is there the same issue of the struggle—the giving way to temptation, the smothering of conscience, the bold trampling under foot of God's clear written law: 'Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin!'

And if this text be true in its first clause—as true of us as of Eve—no less true is it in what follows: 'Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.'

We saw how it was with Adam and Eve after they had sinned. 'Their eyes were opened, and

they knew that they were naked.' They felt ashamed, guilty, afraid of God, and they sought to hide from His presence among the trees of the garden.

And this is the case still. After we have committed sin comes an awakening, an opening of the eyes to the enormity of our transgression—and along with this a shrinking from God. We are afraid of Him. He is turned from being our loving Father into our dread Judge and Punisher. And so we shun Him; aye, and all that recalls Him to us—His house of prayer, His Holy Table, His revealed word. We have now no pleasant thoughts associated with the thought of God; our only thought of Him is as an Avenger—one to be avoided, escaped from: 'Whither shall I go from Thy presence?'

Thus does the poor, guilty soul instinctively tread the old maze of error, and try the old subterfuge of those who were first made sinners; try to hide itself from God, as Adam and Eve tried to hide themselves among the trees of the garden.

And what is hiding from God but death, death of the soul? In His presence is life; out of His presence—'cast out of the sight of His eye'—is gloom, desolation, death. And this is the fruit and offspring of sin: 'Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death!' Yes, sin separates the soul

from God; sin causes division, sets up God for our adversary; sin is at the root of all our misery; sin kills all joy, all gladness, all peace; sin turns the pleasantest spot into a desolate wilderness; sin makes what would be sweet bitter. Sin is the bane of the apparently happiest lot; it mars our enjoyment of the life that now is, and it clouds our hope of that which is to come.

And this sin, which is at the root of so much human misery, is the child of disobedience: 'Lust bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death!'

I have dwelt upon this solemn subject as one directly connected with the Fall, as a subject we may well be called upon to ponder.

You will find, I think, abundant confirmation of what has been said from what you know of your own lives, or from what you have known and noticed of the lives of those around you. The more you think of it the more will you find that the history of the Fall is a history that repeats itself continually; that wherever, and whenever lust is allowed to obtain its object, to fulfil the evil desire, 'It bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.'

I have not entered into the question, whether there be any escape from that death, any rising again from that fall. I leave the inquiry for

another time. But I wish, I most earnestly wish to press this truth home, that if we let our evil nature have its course in any direction, whether in the direction of covetousness, or dishonesty, or intemperance, or unchastity, it will be our ruin; it will cause us to fall; it may be a very grievous fall; it may be never to rise again.

The only safeguard for us is a life of watchfulness and prayer, and humble walking with our God. Keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right. Stop your ears to the voice of the tempter; listen not to his cunning whisper, 'Ye shall not surely die.' God hideth away His face; He will not see it! or He will not care for it!

Be sure, be very sure that God does see and care for every act and word of His creatures. He is a God present everywhere, in all places, and at all times. There is not a word in our tongue, nor a thought in our heart, but He knoweth it altogether. He is about our path, and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways.

Oh, try to live, brethren, as ever in the sight of this all-seeing, all-noticing Lord God, that you may not come into condemnation; that you may court, and not shun, His inquisition of you, because you keep a conscience void of offence. Try to live so holily, so blamelessly, that you may take

the Psalmist's beautiful prayer, and make it your own: 'Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' (Ps. cxxxix.)

VI.

TRUE ABSTINENCE.

A SERMON FOR LENT.

'Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.'—St. Matt. vi. 16.

THE Collect for this Sunday (first Sunday in Lent) speaks of our Lord's long fast in the wilderness, and also of the cause of that fast: 'O Lord, who for our sakes didst fast forty days and forty nights.' And it contains a petition to Him—the one leading petition of the whole prayer—that we may have grace to fast, or, in the very words of the Collect, 'to use such abstinence that, the flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey His godly motions in righteousness and true holiness.' And the reason why fasting or abstinence is thus brought forward in the Collect, is because this is the first Sunday in Lent; and Lent, which lasts forty days, has always been set apart for a season of fasting or abstinence in the Church of Jesus Christ.

However the thing itself may have fallen out of use, there stands the reminder of it; and as long

as our Church stands will the cry go forth which we heard on Ash Wednesday: 'Turn ye even to Me, saith the Lord, with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God.'

Yes, that is the note that sounds throughout the service of Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent; and that note is taken up and repeated in the Collect for the first Sunday in Lent: 'O Lord, who for our sakes didst fast forty days and forty nights, give us grace to use'—abstinence!

And, such being the case, I purpose to speak a few words to you on the subject of Christian fasting, or abstinence. I shall try, by the help of God's word, to set plainly before you what that fasting is which will do you good—what, in your circumstances, would be an acceptable fast. For this cause I have chosen for a text our blessed Lord's own words in St. Matt. vi.—words which form, you may have noticed, part of the Gospel for Ash Wednesday: 'When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.'

'Their reward' was the praise of their fellow-men, who, deceived by their sanctimonious and severe looks, gave them credit for being religious above common. But such, says our Lord, shall

not be the case with you—with any who are My disciples: 'Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which seeth in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.'

This is a rule which applies to other things besides fasting—which applies to saying of prayers, to giving of alms. In all these matters, in everything that concerns religion or the service of God, we are to beware of hypocrisy, of pretence, of outward display. Our alms, our prayers, our fasting, are to be in secret. We are not to invite the world's attention by any peculiarity of look or habit, any ostentation of religiousness; we are not to go about the world with an air of superior saintliness, which seems to say, 'Look at me! I am not as other men are: I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' We are not for a pretence to make long prayers; we are not to do anything in religion only to be seen of men. We are to keep for our closets, for the privacy of our homes, the utterance of our most solemn thoughts and deepest religious feelings. 'When thou prayest enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.' And again, 'When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. And so with fasting: 'When thou fastest, anoint thy head and

wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret.'

This is very remarkable—the great stress which our Lord lays upon secresy, retirement, avoiding all show and parade in matters of religion. It is hardly enough kept in mind. Whether it be our devotions, or our charities, or our abstinence, or our strict moral life, we are, I fear, most of us apt to make a show of these before the world. The old leaven of the Pharisee is still at work, and very few there are in any generation who are quite free from this error—very few who have ceased to court the praise of men, who seek in their religion the praise that cometh from God only.

The more is there reason why we should call attention to the words of our Lord on this subject —that we should remind you again and again that the religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of the heart, inward and spiritual, not outward and formal —a religion that avoids distinction in mere external things, that does not court attention by peculiarities of dress, or manners, or speech. That abhors all affectation, is sincere and unpretending—that lives, if I may so speak, a hidden life, is refreshed and strengthened by unseen help, by the might of secret prayer and silent communing of the heart with God.

And now, to speak of that particular in religion with which I started,—fasting:—

First, I would premise that it is a part of our religion, recognised as such by our Church, recognised and sanctioned by the words and example of our Lord Himself. 'When ye fast,' He says, clearly taking it for granted that such was a common custom with His hearers. He found the practice, and He left it as He found it. He does not, I think, lay great stress upon it. As far as mere abstaining from food goes, if we except the one great fast of forty days before He began His ministry, it does not appear that He Himself or His disciples were very rigorous in observing stated times of fasting. It was remarked of His disciples, and made a matter of reproach to them, that they fasted not: 'The disciples of John fast often, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but Thine eat and drink!'

Still our Lord has not said anything in the Gospel to do away with fasting, as an exercise of wholesome self-denial, good in its place and season for the soul. What He has said, is, 'Avoid making a show of your fasting: When ye fast be not as the hypocrites!' If you fast at all, let it not appear in your face and look. Be as cheerful, be as unchanged, as usual: 'Anoint thine head and wash thy face that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which seeth in secret!'

That is our Lord's rule for Christian fasting, or abstinence. If done, do it in secret. Do it be-

cause you feel that it is beneficial; that it helps to subdue the flesh to the spirit; do it not with any idea of merit, but as a means of self-mastery; do it as unto the Lord, in His sight; and not to be seen of men.

And what shall we describe fasting to be? Is it merely abstaining from our usual food? Surely not. Surely if this were all that is meant by it I should hardly think it a subject on which to preach to you in this church to-day. There are churches and congregations in which a sermon on fasting in the most literal sense of the word might seem to be desirable. When a congregation is made up only of rich, well-to-do people—people who fare sumptuously every day of their life, and who, some of them, from that cause, are apt to grow self-indulgent, and to be over curious and nice about what they eat; there it might be for their profit to press the duty of abstinence, to 'cry aloud and spare not,' to hold up the harm that comes of luxurious living, how degrading it is to be the slave of appetite, how wrong to spend in gratifying the palate at a single meal what might have procured wholesome food for long days.

But such persons are not present amongst us.

I speak to those whose table is through all the year a frugal table; who, if they have enough, many of them, have not more than enough of plain daily food.

And how shall I ask of you to fast? Surely I could not, were fasting the mere lessening the amount of what you eat. You need your daily food that you may be strong for your daily work. You could ill bear any diminution of it. But what about another thing? What about the amount of drink? Do we — does the poor man need always all that he takes of this? Is there no room for abstinence here? Might not some restrict themselves in what they drink, and be all the better, the healthier, the happier for it?

I am sure you must allow that they might. Too large — much too large a share of a labourer's wages often goes not in providing food and clothes and schooling for his family, but in providing drink for his own selfish gratification. It is to such persons that I now speak, or if none of them are present, it is such that I have in my mind when I exhort you to use abstinence. Let them, I would say, let them try the effect of a Lenten fast, not from good, wholesome, invigorating food, but from that most pernicious poison, strong drink. Let them pray God for grace that they may abstain forty days and forty nights from going to the public-house. Let them arouse themselves, and shake off the cords of their evil habit and show themselves men! show that they can resist, yea, can master temptation.

This would be, indeed, a good use to make of

Lent. This would, indeed, be an acceptable fast, a loosening of the bonds of wickedness, a return of the soul once more into the way of liberty, an escape out of the worst slavery, the slavery of bad habit! 'For,' writes St. Peter, 'of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.'

I have touched upon an old topic; but, alas! not without cause. There are only too many amongst us whose conscience, if appealed to, must convict them of transgressing the bounds of Christian soberness. To all such persons, if present, in their own ear; if not present, by the report of others, let me say again, in all earnestness, as one who watches for their souls, 'Abstain from strong drink!' Try the rule of our Church. Try for forty days to go without it. Try not in reliance upon your own strength, but in reliance upon God's strength—His grace, which is never denied to any who humbly and heartily entreat for it.

Yes; and let us all try to profit by this season. For surely it is intended for the good of all. We have, all of us, a work to do, for which this is the fittest time, and that is, to repent; to lament worthily, *i. e.*, in some just proportion to the offence—to lament worthily our sins, and to acknowledge our wretchedness, in order that we may obtain of God, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness.

This is our work—a very pressing work; for

without repentance there is no remission of sin. And it is a work we must do by ourselves, one in which we can get little help from man. For true repentance is the fruit of godly sorrow, and godly sorrow has its root in the heart.

May God cause us first to feel — if we have not felt already—the smart and anguish of that inward sorrow, and afterwards apply His healing balm! May He create in us, as He only can, the disposition of repentance. May He give us new and contrite hearts; and may He accept from us His own gift — the heart which He has bruised and softened, and for Christ's dear sake, turn His face away from our sins, and put out all our misdeeds!

For — and this is our encouragement to repent — He is a merciful God, full of compassion, long-suffering, and of great pity. He spareth when we deserve punishment, and in His wrath He thinketh upon mercy!

VII.

THE EMPTY HOUSE.

'Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.'—St. Matt. xii. 44.

THIS is St. Matthew's version of that part of our Lord's teaching which we read in the Gospel for this Third Sunday in Lent. It is, you will see, the same as St. Luke's account, with the addition of the word '*empty*'—a word, however, which gives much force to the short, but most instructive parable introduced in this page of the Gospel.

In that parable, and more particularly in the verse now before us, we have set forth the danger to which we are exposed from our great enemy, Satan; how malicious he is, how watchful to do us harm, how quick to seize his opportunity, to take advantage of an unguarded heart.

'Then he saith'—*i. e.*, the Evil Spirit saith, for he it is who is speaking—'I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.'

Now, if we look at these words, we shall find that there are three things to be noticed. First,

the assertion made by Satan, that the house—the heart of man—is naturally his, belongs to him: 'I will return into my house.' Secondly, that he is not always in possession of it, 'From whence I came out.' And thirdly, that the house is, alas! too often open to him to return; in a condition to invite him back; ready prepared for his reception: 'And when he is come he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.'

First, then, of the assertion that the heart of man is naturally Satan's house, a place in which he dwells, where he has rest, where he is obeyed.

This, I fear, is not to be disputed. Ever since the Fall, man's condition is that of a being very far gone from original righteousness, of his own nature inclined to evil. Ever since the Fall, Satan has found an easy entrance into man's heart. It is his *palace*, in which he, 'the strong man, keepeth his goods;' the various powers and faculties of our soul which he uses as instruments of his service. There he reigns and lords it over us, and leads us captive at his will. Out of that heart in which he is seated 'proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, theft, false witness, blasphemies.'

That is the proof of what I said; that man is a fallen creature, very far gone from goodness, naturally inclined to evil, naturally averse from godliness; in his unregenerate state a very house and abode of the evil spirit.

But Holy Scripture, which thus describes our fallen condition, and the tyranny of Satan under which we labour, tells us also of a means of deliverance.

Jesus Christ was manifested for this, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Jesus Christ is that strong Saviour—*stronger than the strong man*—who has fought with and overcome the wicked one. He for us has obtained the victory, and Satan can no longer claim us absolutely for his own. But yet he lays siege to us; he is not yet altogether got rid of; he is only cast out for a while—cast out of us by the grace of God given us in reply to prayer; given us in the due use of our Christian privileges, in the sacraments, and other ordinances of the Gospel.

And this brings me to the second point: 'When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man.' This should show that Satan is not left in sole undisputed possession of the house of man; that there are times when he is driven forth, obliged to give way and leave us; when for a time, at least, we seem once more to have regained our liberty!

And blessed times they are! Blessed to feel that we are free men, that we are no longer the slaves of Satan, servants of sin; that God, and not God's enemy, reigns over us; God, whose service is perfect freedom!

I can imagine such a time being to a young Christian the time of his Confirmation. That, surely, is a time of deliverance. Called upon publicly to renew the promise of his baptism, to renounce the devil, to believe in God, and to serve Him; convinced of sin by self-examination, brought to feel how bitter a thing it is to depart from God's commandments, the young Christian comes forward and does as he is required. He renounces the devil, and he chooses Christ to be his Lord. Henceforth he will be Christ's true soldier and servant; henceforth he will study to do his Lord's will, and walk in his Lord's way, and serve Him, and Him alone, in holiness and righteousness all the days of his life.

And he does well. It is right fit, and his bounden duty, to come forward and make his avowal of Jesus Christ as his Lord, and his disavowal of Satan. Yes, and he reaps the benefit of so doing. He is sensible of a change for the better; his heart is lighter, more at liberty; his old sins are forgiven him; he is delivered from the bondage of the unclean spirit.

That is their state who come to confirmation with good dispositions; who regard it, and use it as an occasion for shaking off the yoke of sin and Satan, and taking on them the mild, pure, gentle, holy yoke of Jesus Christ. They walk at liberty, they rejoice in the change of masters. God gives

them some token for good. They are conscious that the cords of sin are loosened in them, that Satan has not the same dominion as he had before over them.

And that, brethren, is no slight blessing. It is worth struggling for; it is worth days and weeks of anxious preparation to be delivered from the tyranny of Satan, to find the chain of some past bad habit broken, to feel in ourselves the working of that Spirit of Christ and of God which is the promised gift in Confirmation, mortifying the works of the flesh and drawing up the mind to high and heavenly things. This is indeed a joy that I would not underrate; this is a state 'full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons.' God grant it may be the state of some of those who are shortly to be confirmed in this church! God grant that they, coming to Confirmation with serious and humble hearts, may gain from it real freedom — may be delivered from the power of Satan, may have the knot of their past sins untied, may henceforth serve their God with a glad and ready service, being strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man! God grant that they may daily increase in that Holy Spirit, more and more, until they come unto His everlasting kingdom!

But look now at a sadder sight! Look at the return of Satan to the house or heart from

whence he had been cast out: 'When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return into my house, whence I came out: and when he is come he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.'

That is a very alarming, but very true picture of our danger—the danger of all of us while we remain in our present state of trial.

Satan, from whom we have been delivered, whom we have renounced, is always on the watch to regain his influence. Like Pharaoh, his type, he does not willingly let the children of God go; he hovers about the house, and watches for an opportunity to thrust himself in. Unless we keep the door shut against him — barred by prayer, barred by watchfulness, barred by wholesome occupation — he will be back again, and in his old place; yes, and back again with increased power.

For what do these words mean: 'Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first?' They mean that if we fall back into our old sin which we have renounced and forsaken,

that sin will rage in us with sevenfold more violence than before.

Take, alas! a very familiar instance,—the case of the relapsed drunkard. By the grace of God a man addicted to intemperance is aroused to a sense of his danger, and breaks off his sin, not without a hard struggle, and becomes a sober man: the unclean spirit is cast out, the poor, oppressed slave is set free. But after a while, in some unguarded hour, the enemy returns and asserts his old sway. His slave is now more his slave than ever. The devil of drink brings with him seven other spirits, and they enter in and dwell in their victim, abide continually with him, sinking him lower and lower into degradation and misery, 'and the last state of that man is worse than the first!'

It is the same with other bad habits, other unclean spirits. When we have once mastered any of these—any besetting sin, such as lying, such as impurity, such as a morose and jealous temper —we are not too soon to conclude that all danger is over, that the foe is quite discomfited, clean gone for ever. Without constant care and watchfulness the bad habit will return; and if it does, it will be more difficult than ever for us to conquer it. 'For,' says a very awful Scripture, 'if, after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome,

the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.' (2 Pet. ii. 20.)

Then, brethren—and this is the practical lesson of our subject—see of yourselves the necessity of watchfulness; see the need you have to be on your guard against your great adversary the devil; see how it concerns you to take every precaution to keep the door of your house shut and fastened against his assaults. Be sober, be vigilant, be much in prayer, if you would retain your Christian liberty, if you would continue Christ's soldiers and servants, and not be the servants, the slaves of sin.

Yes, be sober, be vigilant, be much in prayer, and withal be diligent—not 'slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' Remember always to have your heart occupied, well and fully interested in the work, be it what it may, that God has given you to do. Remember it is the 'empty house, swept and garnished'—the heart unoccupied, idle, and vain—that Satan will be sure to enter, which invites him to return. Take care, I say, that your heart be not thus unoccupied, or occupied with unworthy matters, taken up with vain and frivolous thoughts. Take care that God is much in your thoughts, take care that He fills the chief room in your heart. Be engaged, as was your blessed Lord when on earth, with your heavenly Father's business. Think of yourselves as not your own, as having been bought with a price,

the precious price of the blood of Jesus Christ — bought, redeemed, purchased back from the tyranny of sin and Satan, on purpose that you should henceforth live a nobler life—a life of true liberty in God's service — that 'being,' as writes the Apostle, 'now made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye may have your faith unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.' (Rom. vi. 22.)

VIII.

CHRIST'S CARE FOR THE MULTITUDE.

AN S. P. G. SERMON.

'And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.'—St. Mark, vi. 34.

THIS verse, in St. Mark, precedes the miracle of the five loaves and two fishes, which we have read in the Gospel for this Sunday (the fourth in Lent), and it bespeaks the care of Christ for the multitude: 'When He saw much people He was moved with compassion toward them.' And that compassion did not spend itself in mere words. He knew the wants of that multitude; that they were ignorant, untaught, wandering astray for lack of guidance, 'as sheep not having a shepherd;' and He at once came to the relief of their wants. 'He began to teach them many things;' things, no doubt, that most they needed to learn; that concerned their salvation; that showed them how to walk and please God!

Nor was that all. This great multitude which had followed Him afoot out of the cities—come,

some of them from a long distance—were suffering from bodily hunger. They had nothing to eat. They had brought no provisions with them from home; and they were in a part of the country where none could be procured, 'in a desert place.' The disciples urged Him to send them away, that they might go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But the Lord was of another mind. He answered, 'They need not depart; give ye them to eat.'

What! said the astonished disciples, give five thousand men a meal out of what we have here! 'Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little!' But the Lord persisted: 'How many loaves have ye? And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; but what are they among so many?' Send them away! Feeding such a company out of such a pittance is impossible!

Besides, there was, it may be, lurking in the heart of the disciples a fear that any attempt to feed the multitude out of that small stock would end in their going themselves without a meal. No! they may have thought, no! charity begins at home. If we do break into our scanty reserve of food, what security have we that we ourselves shall not lack? And so they were urgent with our Lord

to send the multitudes away. And yet, as we all know, He did not send them away. He fed them with bread then and there in the wilderness. He fed them abundantly, so that each had enough and to spare. So that when all had eaten, the fragments that remained, and which by His order were gathered up, filled a greater space than the original provision. Out of the leavings of these five loaves and two small fishes,— out of what remained over and above unto them that had eaten, the disciples filled twelve baskets full!

Such is the miracle of the loaves recorded for our learning, by all the four Evangelists, and read in our service on this Sunday.

It is a miracle, and something more. It is a parable; a divine lesson about charity. Better than many words does this Gospel set forth the boundlessness, the expansiveness, the elasticity of genuine, cheerful, loving, uncalculating charity!

Philip and his brother disciples urging Christ to send away the multitude, pleading the impossibility of feeding them out of that small store of provisions, may stand for those, who, when asked to contribute to some work of far-off charity, as to the conversion of the heathen, to the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, hold back their hand, and plead the uselessness of such a service.

What can we do—we, poor enough ourselves—

what can we do in a case like this? You tell us that the heathen more than outnumber all the Christians that are in the world. You tell us that in one part of the world alone, in India, there are 200,000,000 of our fellow-subjects, of whom not more than 200,000 have yet been converted to Christianity. You tell us of Australia, of New Zealand, where so many of our countrymen are gone to dwell, and where, for miles, and hundreds of miles, no Christian minister is to be met with; where they are literally 'as sheep not having a shepherd.' You speak to us about the dense multitudes that people Central and North Africa; sunk in the lowest state of barbarism, without any knowledge at all of God; much less of the the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. And you bid us come to the rescue. You ask for our alms; you ask us to part with our money to send missionaries to teach and to Christianize these far-off overwhelming multitudes! And what good is it? What can our few pence or pounds do to relieve so mighty a want? Besides, look at the calls nearer at home. Look at what is wanted for our own people; to feed the hungry; to teach the ignorant; to reclaim the sinner in our own streets! Surely we shall be excused if we confine our giving to such objects as these—'Send the multitude away!'—'if a man provide not for his own, he is worse

than an infidel!' Charity begins at home. We shall want all we have for ourselves, and for those nearer and dearer to us!

So do men often reason—reason in their hearts, if they do not actually use the words—when they are asked for a work of charity like the one now before us.

And though such reasoning is not sound; though it will not bear the test of Christian judgment; it has, at first sight, something plausible in it, that recommends it to our acceptance.

It does seem, I admit, a hard task this of converting the heathen. It is a work that makes slow progress; a work of which the fruit is not often seen by those who sow the seed. And then there are, as you say, so many claims upon us at home; claims that cannot be neglected; so that even a charitable person may, at some moments, fall into the mistake of doubting the wisdom of missionary labour; of repeating in spirit the remark of Philip, 'Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.'

But if we look at what follows, at our Blessed Lord's acts and words on this occasion, we shall cease, I think, so to reason. We shall have more faith in what a few pounds or pence given in charity can accomplish. For mark, brethren, how Jesus Christ met the difficulty. He bade the

men, the five thousand men, sit down. And He 'took the loaves,' the five barley-loaves, 'and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were sat down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. And they did all eat and were filled.'

We may learn from this to have more heart, more faith in what even apparently small means can effect, in a work of charity, and especially in the great work of evangelizing the world. We may learn that Christ's blessing accompanies Christian giving—that what we spare from our own small stock of means for the relief of others, He can cause to be of use beyond what we think or know; that He can make the work of genuine charity to prosper in quite a marvellous way; that He multiplies our seed sown; and from some small beginning brings about a mighty result: satisfies, as it were, with the bread of life a vast number of souls here in the wilderness!

And such being the case, I have no hesitation in asking you, brethren, to contribute to the cause of Christian missions — aye, of missions to foreign lands to-day. I have no hesitation in saying, that it is a duty you owe to your Lord to take part in this service.

Give, I would say,—give what you can cheerfully, and for a cause which is so entirely the cause of Christ, for the spreading of His Gospel through-

out the earth. Give, trusting to Him to bless your gift; and to use it to the increase of His kingdom; to use it in His own time and in His own way!

Do not draw back, I beg of you, because the work is so great,—because after these many years of missionary labour more than half the world is yet un-Christian.

For consider this—and I use it as an argument to beat down any lingering unwillingness to help, you may any of you feel, consider this: the multitude —the great multitude must be fed; they must not be left to perish; they are precious: as precious as any of us in the eyes of the Great Redeemer. Jesus Christ shed His blood for them as well as for us. Whatever they may be in our sight, with Him they are objects of tender care. When from that High Mountain, that Hill of the Lord whither He is gone up, and from whence He surveys all the kingdoms of the world—all the glory and all the shame of them—He beholds the things that are below, think you that He sees with indifference the great wastes of the earth yet unreclaimed? Think you that He is satisfied because here and there, in some favoured spots, His vineyard is tilled, and the plant that He has planted flourishes and bears fruit, while briars and thorns still occupy the larger share of His heritage? Think you, that it is in accordance with His character, Who spake the Parable of the Lost Sheep, and of the Piece of

Money, to sit still, and never grieve if a few out of many be safe in the fold, while the greater part of His flock is yet astray upon the mountains, a prey to the wild beasts — a prey to the wolf who is ever seeking to catch and to tear them ? Oh, surely, no ; Christ glorified, Christ at God's right hand in the highest heavens, is the same as He was when He walked in Galilee. It is as true of Him now as it was of Him then, what is here written : 'Jesus, when He saw much people, was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd !'

Yes, the sight of the multitude, the vast company on whom He gazes from those far heights, scattered abroad and weary, as sheep not having a shepherd, — the sight of that company touches Him with compassion ! And that compassion — as aforetime—stops not at bare pity. As we read His Gospel we seem to hear His wish concerning them, 'Give ye them to eat.'

Surely,—surely, brethren, that is Christ's own charge to us, His disciples, in reference to the great multitude perishing in the wilderness—to us who are already with Him, in reference to the millions yet living without Him in the world, 'Give ye them to eat.'

And if, hesitating still, because our means are small, we answer, 'We have here but five loaves and two small fishes.' Again we hear His words

saying to us, 'Bring them hither to Me.' And so at every point we are beaten. Nay, I will not say beaten, but I will say, constrained—drawn in in spite of our resistance—drawn in by the weight and authority of His word to do as He requires—to lend a helping hand in carrying out His merciful purpose towards the Gentiles, to lend a helping hand, as only we are able, who are precluded ourselves from being Missionaries, by giving of our goods, our silver, and our gold, to furnish the means of sending out His ministers and messengers to our distant brethren.

There never was, as we are assured, a greater demand than there is at this moment for such help. From all parts of the world, particularly from our large heathen dependency of India, appeals are being made for new and more extensive missions; and these appeals must go unregarded, and all the fair promise which they unfold be lost, if funds are not shortly forthcoming for their support.

In providing those funds every little helps. It is by each and all of us giving something, doing what we can, that works of charity are best sustained and advanced.

Let us, then, unite, brethren, to-day, as we have done on other occasions, poor and rich, one with another, in what surely is a most blessed labour of Christian love. I have shown you the multi-

tudes, the great multitudes that are yet without Christ. I have shown you how the Saviour whom we serve, on whose Cross and Passion we rely to be saved, views those multitudes; the tender pity that fills His heart as He regards them, because they are 'as sheep not having a shepherd!'

And shall we see them with a cold, unfeeling eye? Shall we have no pity? Shall we, Nabal-like, have nothing to spare from our store for their wants?

Oh, surely not! or else must we not fear to have the question asked concerning ourselves, 'Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?'

IX.

THE ENEMY DESTROYED.

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.'—St. John, viii. 51.

THESE words are from the Gospel for this Sunday (5th in Lent). And where shall we find words of greater weight and importance—words more rich in consolation? What do all so much desire as to be assured that we shall conquer death? And here the great promise is that if a man keep Christ's saying he shall never see death!

It is then a text to be often read, marked, learned, and digested; one which carries with it an answer to many a disturbing doubt,—that is calculated to soothe and allay many a fear,—that makes us to triumph in Christ over our dread enemy Death.

In preaching to you from it, there are two things I would consider. First, What our Lord means by His *saying*, 'If a man keep My saying,' and secondly, what He means by *death*, 'He shall never see death.'

First, then, what are we to understand by the Lord's saying, '*My saying?*'

Surely we are to understand by it, all that Jesus Christ spake and taught while He was on earth, and which has been recorded by the four evangelists or by any of His Apostles.

The saying of Christ is the whole scheme of Christian doctrine and precept: all that He said anywhere in the audience of the people,—all that He said more privately in the circle of His disciples. But if there be one part of Christ's saying more solemn than another it is that which He uttered in what is called His Sermon on the Mount. Then it was that He opened His mouth and taught the people as they had never been taught before. Then it was that He laid down for ever the rule of life which all must follow who call themselves His disciples.

Brethren, you all know that divine sermon. You have read it again and again in chapters v., vi., vii. of St. Matthew's Gospel. But reading it and hearing it is not enough. We must practise it; we must seek to live according to our Lord's sermon. The promise is, not—If a man hear my saying,—but, 'If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.'

Would we then enter into life? The answer still is, 'Keep the commandments,'—keep the sayings which Christ our Lawgiver has spoken; Who spake as man never spake before; Who spake not of Himself, but as it was given Him from the Father.

For example, keep Christ's saying about purity: 'I say unto thee, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.' Keep Christ's saying about an offending eye, or an offending hand, or an offending foot; 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee—if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee.' Beware how thou lettest one single bosom sin reign in thee undisturbed. Keep Christ's saying about the treatment of an enemy, —keep His saying about secresy in almsgiving,—about pretence and hypocrisy in prayer,—about laying up treasure,—about over-carefulness,—about rash judgment,—about forgiving our brother: His 'I say unto thee, not seven times, but seventy times seven!'

These are but some of the chief heads of our Lord's teaching. And they are all of the first importance. No man who neglects any of these sayings of His, wilfully and habitually neglects them; no impure person, no unforgiving person, no uncharitable person, no hard censurer of his brethren, no covetous person, no one who in his life and practice goes directly in the face of the Lord's words has any inheritance in His kingdom.

He tells us so Himself. He warns us of the fatal folly of calling Him Lord, while we leave undone His clearly revealed will.

He warns us against trusting to a mere profession of Christianity when we show no proof that we are being in habit and behaviour conformed to the Gospel. 'Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven.'

Oh, think! I beseech you, of this your Lord's own declaration! Let no one persuade you that religion is a thing of words, or feelings, or frames of mind. Religion to be of any good,—to save our soul alive, must be much more than this,—it must influence our practice,—it must be brought to bear daily upon our life and conversation,—it must enter into and mould our speech, our judgments, our whole conduct. In short, religion to profit must be of that kind which the Apostle describes as consisting of deeds of mercy, justice, and kindness to others, and in keeping ourselves unspotted from the world.

That is the religion that will stand in the day of trial,—the religion which is built not upon the sand, but upon the rock. Oh, that it might be ours! Oh, that the Lord when He maketh inquisition of our life, may see cause to liken us to the wise man who heareth His sayings and doeth them; and not to the foolish man who indeed heareth His sayings, but doeth them not!

But I come now to the second part of my text,

'Verily, verily, if a man keep My saying He shall never see death.'

'He shall never see death!' The words were a sore stumbling-block at the time. The Jews, always in bondage to the letter, were greatly offended at a saying which seemed so opposite to all experience. They answered rudely to our Lord, 'Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead and the prophets: and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham which is dead? and the prophets are dead; whom makest thou thyself?'

Yes; no doubt it was a hard saying to those unspiritual Jews. Perhaps to some of us it is a hard saying still. Perhaps we ourselves may be at times disposed to stumble at this word of Christ's. We see death all-powerful in the world; we see king and prince, wise and good, equally with the lowest and most wretched, fall one after another beneath the stroke. Nothing that we can do,—no prayer, no medicine, no eminent worth, has power to put off the destined hour. Dust we are, and to dust we return. Jew and Gentile, Christian and heathen, we all taste of death. And yet our Lord assures us that, if a man keep His saying he shall never see death. How can this be? How do we reconcile the truth of Holy Scripture with our actual experience of man's mortality?

Why, in this way? The death of which our Saviour speaks is not bodily death,—but spiritual death,—the death of the soul. He never promises that we shall escape bodily death. He Himself when He took our nature took also with it the condition of mortality. He Himself who is alive for evermore, once was dead, and laid in the grave. He died and was buried. He does not promise us any release from this the common lot of all men. What He does promise,—what He can make good,—is, that if we be joined to Him by a living faith,—a faith fruitful in all holy obedience,—we too shall overcome death,—shall pass as He has passed through the grave and gate of death to a joyful resurrection!

The death, then, which they who keep Christ's saying shall never see, is eternal death, and eternal death is destruction, everlasting destruction from the presence of our God. From this death Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, can deliver us; and the terms on which He will deliver us are these: 'If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death! . . . This is the will of Him that sent Me: that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.'

Be well assured that this is true; be well assured that faith in Jesus Christ—a faith proved to

be genuine by obedience to Jesus Christ—as it will bring many other blessings with it, so will it bring this as the very chiefest of all,—exemption from the worst terrors of death, from the bitter pains of eternal death!

The man who has this faith, this firm hold of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, has an anchor for his soul sure and steadfast. To him there ariseth up light even in the thickest gloom; with him the life to come is no shadowy dream, but a great reality. His faith can see behind the veil; his faith causes him to triumph, where another, who is without that faith, is utterly cast down and vanquished, in the hour when he comes to die!

At that dread time, when a wicked man is overwhelmed with fears, when an unbelieving man is desolate and without hope, the Christian, the believer in Jesus Christ, the keeper of Christ's sayings, has a sure conviction, a witness in himself, that death is conquered. He knows that his Redeemer liveth; he has felt the power of those great words, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life: He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.'

To conclude. I have shown you the blessing which belongs to those who keep Christ's sayings,

how they are thereby supported in life and supported in death, what a firm hold they thus obtain upon the world to come. As we would share in the blessing, let us observe the terms on which it is promised. Let it be our steadfast, constant aim to keep Christ's saying — not only to call Him Lord, Lord! but to do whatsoever He commands us. Christ's sayings are not grievous; they are full of health to the soul. There is not one, not the least of all of them, that we can safely neglect and leave unheeded. The words which He speaks unto us, every one of them, are quickening words—words which, when received in an honest heart, produce much fruit—fruit unto life eternal.

Oh, I beseech you, let such words be exceeding precious in your sight,—dearer to you than thousands of gold and silver! Settle it in your heart that every saying of Jesus Christ in the Gospel is to be held in honour. Resolve that His word shall be a light unto your feet; resolve that, whatever your difficulty, whatever your perplexity, whatever your sorrow, whatever your need, to Him you will go; that the things which He saith you will do, that in the path He points out for you, in that you will walk.

He cannot lead you wrong. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He that followeth Him

shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. Jesus saith, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father: and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.'

X.

SORROW AT THE APPROACH OF DEATH.

'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.'—St. Matt. xxvi. 38.

THERE are few words more touching, more awful than these, in the whole Gospel: they are the words of Jesus Christ at the beginning of His Agony in the Garden. They tell us to what an exceeding bitter trial He was subjected—how much He endured for us men and for our redemption: 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.'

Let us ponder these words, and may God give us grace to gather from them some instruction in righteousness!

They stand, I have said, at the beginning of the Agony. Let me recall to you what the Agony was, as it is recorded in the chapter we have just heard, St. Matt. xxvi.

After eating the Passover, and instituting His Holy Supper, our Lord had warned the Apostles that they would soon all leave and forsake Him—be offended because of Him that night. 'For it is

written,' He said, 'I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the fold shall be scattered abroad.' They had, all of them, but Peter more especially, protested that they would never be offended, never leave nor forsake Him. Yea, though they should die with Him, yet would they not deny Him! It was immediately after this that Jesus proceeded to the garden called Gethsemane. And when He was at the spot, He said to His disciples, 'Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder.' This He said to the whole band that had accompanied Him. Then took He with Him three selected from the rest, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, 'And He began to be sorrowful and very heavy.' The signs of His sorrow and heaviness were no doubt visible in His countenance; and it may be that His three companions noticed it. 'Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here and watch with me. And he went a little farther,'—about a stone's cast, withdrawing from the three, as He had before from the eleven; and being now quite alone with God, 'He fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!'

After this He returned to His disciples, to the three, and findeth them asleep, though He had charged them to watch with Him. 'And He saith

unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Then He left them, and went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me except I drink it, Thy will be done.' And He came back to the disciples and found them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy. And He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 'And being in an agony' (writes St. Luke), 'He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.' And He arose the third time from prayer, and cometh to His disciples, yet, as it would appear, asleep. And He saith unto them, 'Sleep on now, and take your rest; behold, the hour is at hand; and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.' As if He had said, 'Your sleeping or your watching is alike useless now. All is over: you cannot prevent my approaching capture.' 'Rise, let us be going: behold, he that betrayeth Me is at hand.'

Such is the short, simple, affecting narrative of our Lord's agony in the garden.

It has, we are sure, many lessons for ourselves. It shows us, as I said, how terrible and severe was the trial to which our Lord was exposed for us. It

shows us what it cost the Holy Jesus before He could redeem man. We are apt to think only of His crucifixion when we speak of what Christ endured on our behalf. We forget that it was only a part, the crowning part of His great sorrow wherewith He was afflicted in the days of His flesh. We forget that all His life long He was learning obedience by the things which He suffered—and never more so than in that awful scene in the garden.

There surely, as much as upon Calvary, we may learn at what a price we have been brought back to God!

'Go'—I would say, in the words of a well-known Christian hymn—'Go to dark Gethsemane,' if thou wouldest at all worthily understand the mystery of redemption; if thou wouldest know what thy Lord underwent when He took upon Him to be thy Saviour! 'Go to dark Gethsemane.'—See thy Lord heavy in spirit—'exceeding sorrowful even unto death!' See Him, alone, fallen on His face to the ground—wrestling in prayer with God! Mark the agonies that wring His frame! See the drops of sweat as it had been drops of blood falling from Him to the ground! Hear His thrice uttered, unheeded cry—'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!' And His thrice uttered acquiescence in its rejection, 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!'

Remember who it is that thus prays—is thus in heaviness—sweats these drops of blood—even the Holy One and the Just,—the sinless Son of God—a Being without spot and blameless; whose conscience could not reproach Him with a single act of folly; whose life had been a life of self-sacrifice, piety, and love; such as to make Him a favourite both with God and man! Bear this in mind, and you may well conclude that all this heavy load of undeserved sufferings was borne not for His own sins, but for the sins of mankind. Surely, you will say, as you look on that prostrate figure fallen on His face, sad at heart, sorrowful even unto death, 'Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all!'

That must be the first great lesson for us to learn from our Lord's agony, as it is the first great lesson of His crucifixion—at what a cost have we been redeemed!—what must sin be—how hateful, how deadly—that so it behoved Christ to suffer or ever He could make the atonement!

That is a thought forced upon us by the Agony as well as by the Cross of Christ. Let it not be without its sobering effect upon you. Trifle not, brethren,—trifle not with that which caused your Lord's bitter grief. Oh, flee from sin, and from all that tempts to sin, as from a thing most loathsome, most to be shunned,—as that which wrung your

Lord's gentle heart with agony—as that which called from Him, at other times so silent and self-restrained under trial, the expression of His deep inward misery, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death!'

But there are other lessons to be derived from the Agony—from the sight of Jesus Christ sad and sorrowful under the fear of approaching death. Lessons good and useful for us to ponder. Scenes of distress await us all. It is vain to expect to pass through this world without our share of sharp affliction. Now when affliction comes, it may help us to bear it, that we have in our Lord an example—'an example of suffering affliction and of patience.' We see Him going before us in the way. And our aim should be to walk as He walked in that thorny path.

Look, then, once more at Jesus Christ as He is shown to us by the Evangelist in the garden of Gethsemane. We see Him sorely troubled, and yet not in despair—grieved and wounded, and very heavy, and yet submissive and resigned to the Hand that afflicted Him. His one resource is prayer. He fell on His face and prayed—prayed fervently, prayed repeatedly,—continued instant in prayer. Almost every word that fell from His lips during His agony was a prayer.

Yes, and what prayers they were! How breathing of piety, of patience, of resignation! He

prayed for deliverance: 'If it be possible let this Cup pass from me!' He prayed with faith, entirely believing that God could hear and deliver Him: 'Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee!' He prayed that His prayer might be granted only so far as it was in accordance with His Father's will: 'If Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me, nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done!'

Yes, there is our example! That is how we should behave in the hour of trouble—'Whensoever by any manner of adversity it shall please our heavenly Father to visit us.' Oh, may we have grace to copy that example! Oh, when distress and trial fall upon us, may our hearts turn for guidance and support to our suffering Lord!

Our sorrows, our afflictions, our distresses, can never be so sharp as His—never so undeserved. But if we would bear them as a Christian should—if we would rise out of them stronger and better—if we would profit by our affliction—then must we, when it comes upon us, be imitators of Jesus Christ—then must we have refuge as He had refuge in prayer—fervent prayer—humble prayer—solitary prayer—prayer for strength—prayer for deliverance—prayer for a resigned and patient will. 'O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt!'

And again, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death!' These words show, as do so

many others that Jesus spoke, how truly He shares our human nature—is a partaker of our condition,—One who knows by His own experience what is in man—was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.

If there be, as there surely is in many men's hearts, a fear and shrinking at the thought of death, in that fear and shrinking we have Jesus Christ for a sympathising friend. 'My soul,' He said, 'is exceeding sorrowful even unto death!' The Holy One, the blameless One, yet feared to die! The prospect of it when near in view, weighed upon Him with heaviness. He knew that He must die. He knew that He should accomplish great things by His death. He knew that it was the gate to happiness unspeakable and full of glory—and yet, it would seem, He shrunk back from the act of dying. 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto to death.' 'Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour!'

And this, too, is recorded for our instruction. Many a good, well-living, pious Christian man is afraid of death. And as the hour for his departure approaches, he is conscious of a state like that described by the Psalmist. 'Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me: and a horrible dread hath overwhelmed me!'

Now it may be a source of consolation for such persons to recollect that Christ their Master—

Christ whom they love—Christ on whom they lean, shared that very fear, and that He will not let them be tried by it above that they are able, but will find out for them a way of escape, that they may be able to bear it!

Yes! and they know—for they have read it in the Gospel—what is the way of escape.

Surely it lies in doing as their Lord did when His righteous soul was shaken with the same trouble. 'He fell on His face and prayed;' prayed at first that He might be spared the bitter cup; and then that He might have strength to drink it.

There we have indicated very clearly the remedy for the fear of death. It consists in this—in casting ourselves upon God—in earnest prayer, that He would take away our fear; or if not, that He would turn it to our profit—use it for fitting and preparing us against our last hour, by working in us that repentance, that faith, that reliance upon our Saviour which give us the victory over our foe.

They who so pray will not be left uncomforted. Though the trouble remain—aye, and remain unto the end; yet shall it not prevail to sink the soul into despair. Hope, hope sent from God, will come to lift us up when we are down. Hope joined with love that casteth out fear, even as that bright Presence came to the side of our agonized Lord and

upheld Him in His darkest hour; when, as we read, after He had prayed — after He had resigned Himself to the will of God—'there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven strengthening Him!'

One further word, the fear of death which so many have to wrestle with may arise from many causes, which I will not enter into now. I will only touch upon one circumstance connected with death, which serves to make it terrible, and that is its loneliness.

Christ was alone in the garden when the horror of death fell so heavy on His spirit. We shall be alone when we come to die. There may be friends with us in the room—there may be Christ's minister, but the soul is not the less alone. No eye is a witness of what passes in the heart, no ear of man can hear the groaning of the spirit that cannot be uttered. As I said, the soul is alone—so far as human companionship can affect it—alone in the hour of death—alone in the Day of Judgment!

And this is the reason why death is so often feared. For man yearns for sympathy, for fellowship, for some one to stand by him, and be with him, to take his part, and to share his burden!

Two—says the Scripture—are better than one. But if so, mark the conclusion—live with God, and for God, and then you will not be alone when you die. Acquaint now thyself with Him. Fear,

love, honour, and serve Him while you are strong and well; and then you will have Him to comfort you, and support you, and cheer you with His presence, when most you need comfort, support, and cheer. In the loneliness of death, in the weakness of death, in your experience of the utter helplessness of man, you will find how true this saying is of God's servant in the old time—'My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!'

XI.

ECCE HOMO!

SUNDAY BEFORE EASTER.

'Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!'—St. John, xix. 5.

WE are come again to the beginning of Passion Week, the week in which our Blessed Lord suffered,—suffered death in its cruellest and most lingering form,—death upon the cross for us men and for our salvation.

The particulars of His suffering are given at full in the Scriptures appointed to be read at this season. Many pages of our Prayer-book beginning with this the Sunday before Easter, are filled with those sufferings. And all this week, up to Good Friday evening, the selected lessons, both from the Old and New Testament, are occupied with the same theme. It is well that we should study those Scriptures—well, that we should hear them where we are able in the services of our Church, and also read and meditate upon them at home. For by so doing, by reading daily during this week the several records of our Lord's bitter grief as set forth in the Lessons and Gospels, such

an impression would be made upon us of the awfulness and severity of His sufferings as could not soon be effaced. We should surely thereby have stirred up in us a true sorrow, and a true love; sorrow for the part we have in causing these sufferings, sorrow for our sins—and love for Him who endured such things, who freely and deliberately submitted Himself to die—and to die by such a death, in order that He might work out our deliverance, be the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world!

Good Friday—the day on which He was put to death,—will seem the fittest day to speak to you from this place about His crucifixion; what brought it about, what it has effected, what are the benefits that we receive from it. And when that day comes, I shall hope, if God will, to preach on that great topic. To-day I have chosen for our consideration one particular incident in our Lord's Passion, which has been recorded only by St. John,—the remark of Pilate, on bringing our Lord forth to the people, 'Behold the Man!' It is a remark that again and again will force itself upon us as we study seriously and devoutly the Scriptures of this solemn week. 'Behold the Man!' is what St. Matthew says to us; is what St. Mark says to us; is what St. Luke says to us; equally with St. John, in the narrative which they have left us of the last days of Jesus Christ,—His last days of suffering; till He had

fulfilled all that was written of Him; till He had drunk the cup that His Father gave Him to its dregs. Behold the Man! Behold what manner of man He was! Behold how He bore Himself! Behold, that you may love Him! Behold, that you may admire Him! Behold, that you may worship Him! Behold, that you may go away and pray that the same mind may be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!

And, first, of the incident itself. It is one that has taken a strong hold on the human mind. One which has often been represented in a picture—which has ere now formed the title and indicated the argument of Christian treatises. 'Behold the Man!' What attention do the words command! How in those few syllables, does Jesus again stand before us, as once He stood at Pilate's unjust tribunal, 'wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe!' How do we seem to be ourselves lookers-on—eye-witnesses of all that they did to Him: and of His demeanour under their treatment!

Pilate, you will recollect, had tried ineffectually to release his prisoner. Again and again he had protested before the multitude and their rulers that he found no fault in Him! It was a custom at the Passover feast to release one prisoner; let this, he said, be the man. 'Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?' But no, the choice of the people—a choice suggested by the chief priests—

fell on a very different head. 'They cried out, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas'—a robber and a murderer! Then Pilate, after seeking by a significant action, to shift upon others the guilt of his own injustice, after washing his hands before the multitude, gave sentence that it should be as they required. 'Then released he Barabbas unto them, and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.' And now the soldiers, into whose hands our Lord was delivered, in derision of the title which Pilate had given Him, 'King of the Jews,'—the Roman soldiers, who only recognised Cæsar as their king, indulged their brutal humour by putting upon their prisoner the mock ensigns of royalty. 'They plaited a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe'—purple being the colour worn by kings—and a reed in His right hand for a sceptre: and they bowed the knee before Him and said, Hail King of the Jews. And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, out of His unresisting hand, and smote Him on the head, and others smote Him with the palms of their hands!

At this point Pilate appears once more, and once more testifies to His innocence. He went out, leaving the judgment-seat, and said before all the people, 'Behold, I bring Him forth to you that ye may know that I find no fault in Him!'

Then, at a signal from the governor, Jesus,

surrounded by His mocking guard, 'came forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.' He came forth, and Pilate, pointing to Him, fixed every eye in that great crowd upon Him: 'Behold,' he said, 'behold the Man!'

He said it, we think, not to aggravate our Lord's sorrow; not to add a taunt to what He was already enduring; but as a word of pity, and appeal for forbearance, to the bloodthirsty crowd. As if he had said, 'See this man—see how powerless he is—how entirely unable to assert his authority. How little of a king! See how he yields himself up; makes no resistance, finds no party to rescue him; see this man, and be satisfied with what has been done to him, the scourging and the mocking, and consent now to his being let go.'

That, surely, is implied in the words here used by Pilate, 'Behold the Man!' They were spoken half in pity, half in contempt, with a wish to save Jesus from execution. But the people would not listen. They were steeled against pity. Their leaders, the chief priests and rulers, raised the bloody cry, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' And Pilate gave way. Pilate, against his better judgment, gave way; but even in so doing, he once more bore witness to the Lord's innocence, 'Take ye Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him!'

Never before or since has such a thing occurred. Innocent men have, indeed, in times of violence,

been sacrificed to popular clamour. But never one so innocent as this, never with such open witness to his innocence out of the very lips of the condemning judge! As St. Peter puts it, in words that must have pierced them to the quick, when, not long after, he preached to his countrymen in the Porch that is called Solomon's: 'Ye delivered up Jesus, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, where he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life!'

Yes, 'the Prince of Life!' For it was by His dying that He destroyed death, and by His rising to life again that He hath restored to us everlasting life! Great, unspeakably great, as was the wrong done to Him,—inexcusable as the Jewish people were—inexcusable as Pilate was, yet were they instruments in bringing about what God had before determined, and what in His Holy Scriptures He has revealed, viz., that Christ must suffer: the Just for the unjust; that He could not enter into His glory before He was crucified; could not achieve the victory, and be crowned as conqueror over sin, and death, and hell, except He should first, by the grace of God, taste of death for every man, and be made perfect through sufferings!

So far, then, of the incident in the text—the bringing of Jesus forth, arrayed as a king, in

mockery, and the presenting Him to the people by His unjust judge,—'Behold the Man!'

Pilate, I have already observed, said this in pity and in contempt. But to us, as we read them, the words are an exhortation to admire, and reverence, and fall down and worship the Holy and Innocent Person who is thus set, as it were, visibly before us. 'Behold the Man!' Set your eyes upon Him and look! Was there ever such another? Did ever man speak as He spoke? Did ever man do such miracles as Jesus did? Did ever man suffer as He suffered? Was there ever sorrow like unto His sorrow wherewith the Lord afflicted Him, when He laid on Him the iniquity of us all? Surely you will say it—there never was. For never did innocence and injury so meet together in one person. Never before or since has there stood upon earth one born of woman who was as Jesus was, perfectly holy, pure, and blameless, and who, being all this, was treated as the vilest criminal, done to an ignominious and cruel death —the death of the cross! No; He is without a parallel, either in His perfect righteousness, or most unmerited punishment! We look with awe and shaded face at such a spectacle. The more we gaze at it the more awful does it seem. Like those who stood on Calvary and saw the end, we beat inwardly our breasts, beholding the things that are done unto Him! Like the cen-

turion, who watched beside the cross, and heard His last cry, we exclaim, as we close the book that holds the image of the Man of Sorrow, and which is opened to us again in the service of this Sunday, 'Certainly, this was a righteous man—Truly this was the Son of God!' (St. Luke, xxiii. 47; St. Matt. xxvii. 54.)

And yet, brethren, the sight which the Scriptures of this week show us of Christ crucified,—a sight, as I have said, to which there is no parallel, nothing like it in all recorded history,—is not a sight for simple wonder. It is a sight full of lessons for our learning. Christ—never forget it—is set forth in these Scriptures, first of all, as our Propitiation, atoning with His most precious blood for our sins,—opening a way back for us to pardon,—cancelling our enormous debt; and, secondly, He is set forth, exhibited to us as our example, showing us how we too should have our conversation, how we should bear ourselves under ill-treatment, how we should walk and please God.

And thus you will see there is great practical good to be gained from a study of these same Scriptures, which are appointed to be read at this time. Behold, I would say, behold in these pages—behold in them, day by day, as you turn them over in your homes—behold the pattern Man!—behold how the Lord Jesus Christ in these the last days of His flesh conducted Himself. Mark, one

by one, the features of His heavenly mind; mark His patience—mark His humility—mark His piety —mark His thought and care for others—mark His self-sacrifice!

Look now only at what is recorded of Him in the 2nd Morning Lesson, and in the Gospel for this Sunday. Mark His love—His tender care and thought for others as shown in instituting the Holy Supper, appointing on the very night on which He was betrayed a most simple and touching ordinance, through which in all time to come His faithful followers might be enabled not only to bear in mind His redeeming mercy — the great sacrifice once made and never to be repeated, of His death upon the cross, but also to draw down into their souls the fruit of Redemption, remission of their sins, and all other benefits of His Passion to their great and endless comfort!

Mark, I say, His great care and forethought in providing for us at such a time such a means— such a great means — of grace, such a memorial of His loving-kindness; and do not, dear brethren, do not let it be said that we are indifferent to His appointment. Do not fail to see that as it is our duty — our bounden duty — so it ought also to be our delight, our highest, richest joy, to receive the Holy Communion in remembrance of the sacrifice of His death as He Himself has commanded!

Mark again, in that Second Lesson, His humi-

lity, His resignation, His self-surrender, as most noticeable in His agony in the garden. Three times fallen down on His face, apart and alone, He besought God that, if it were possible, He might be spared the approaching horror of His Crucifixion! 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me!' and three times he added, 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!'

Mark His patience! How, without a word of complaint or anger, He took all that was done unto Him. When He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. When they did spit on His face and smite Him with the palms of their hands, and bid Him, blindfolded as He was, say who struck Him, He answered nothing! He was dumb before His persecutors, as a lamb is dumb in the slaughterer's hand; and as a sheep before His shearers is dumb, so opened He not His mouth! Yes, mark this great patience of Jesus Christ — a patience which never left Him, which no taunt, no slander, no harsh treatment — no, not the agony of the cross itself — was able to wear out. You have heard of the patience of Job, but the patience of Jesus was greater: in Him Patience had indeed her perfect work; it was 'perfect and entire, wanting nothing!'

And as with His love, as with His humility, as with His resignation, as with His self-surrender, so also is it with His patience. In all these He is our

example; in all these He goes before us, showing us the way. Oh, may we have grace to go with Him in that way! Oh, may we remember that when we fail in any of these things—in humility, in patience, in love, in consideration for others—we are off the right path, we have wandered out of the way, we are not walking with Jesus Christ!

Oh, that, at such moments, Pilate's words might occur with power to our mind, and call us back to our duty, 'Behold the man!' See there the character in which God has pleasure. Form yourselves by that; follow His blessed footsteps; keep close to Him in thy daily walk; follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness!

XII.

THE LAST WORDS.

GOOD FRIDAY.

'Remember the words of the Lord Jesus.'—Acts, xx. 35, part.

WE gather together to-day, brethren, on the saddest and most solemn occasion of all the year: we meet to behold Christ crucified, to be witnesses of His sufferings, to see the things that were done unto Him on that day — more than eighteen hundred years ago — when it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, to put Him to grief, to lay on Him the iniquity of us all!

On such a day we must needs feel great sorrow. If we do not — if, on Good Friday, we are nowise moved by the recollection of what took place upon it — if we pass that day as though it were any other day, it is a sure proof that we have not yet realised the awfulness of the event that happened on it, — the greatness of the cost of our Redemption.

When on this day I see, in this professedly Christian land, so many persons who care not in any way to observe it holy, who seem to have no

concern nor interest in what was done on Good-Friday, who go about their business or their pleasure just as usual, I recall the words of the Great Prophet who speaks by anticipation in the person of Jesus Christ: 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger!'

And to you, brethren, who are concerned, who do feel an interest in this day, who have paused from your labours and pursuits, and are come together here in God's house of prayer, who are witnesses, as it were, of the Crucifixion, what shall I say to you about it beyond what you have already heard and seen?

This will I say: Look with me a little longer on Him Whom they pierced. Give your attention while I call to your mind some of the very last words of your dying Lord. Listen to what Jesus Christ uttered, stretched out in agony on His cross, and you will surely be moved, by what He said, to love Him yet more heartily, to reverence Him more deeply, and by God's help to imitate Him more closely. You will go back from our assembling of ourselves here with your hearts sensibly touched by the spectacle you have seen, even as did some of that multitude gathered on Calvary to

see Him die, who, 'beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned.'

During His sharp agony, which lasted for six hours — from nine o'clock till three — our Lord spake seven several times.

The words were few, as was to be expected; but they were words of great meaning — words that will ring in the ears of Christians till the end.

To five of these last words I now invite your attention.

The first was a prayer to God for His murderers recorded in St. Luke, xxiii. 34: 'Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

At that very time He was nailed to the cross! The people around Him had done it. They had shown no compunction, they were mocking and jeering at Him, adding insult to cruelty. But for all that He has not a word of anger nor threat, not a complaint to make against any of them! With the iron spikes driven through His helpless hands and feet, in the midst of unspeakable torture, He lifts up His voice — that voice which had been dumb while they did unto Him what they listed — and offers up a prayer that God would pardon them: 'Father, forgive them!'

That prayer of Jesus on the cross best enforces what He taught in His Sermon on the Mount.

Henceforward those words of His, 'Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you,' have a weight and obligation not to be withstood; they are sealed and ratified by His example.

Think often of this, brethren. Be sure that we cannot be Christ's disciples, that we have no part nor lot with Him, if at any time we find ourselves fostering feelings of revenge,—if at any time we are backward to forgive our brother, our offending brother, his trespasses. Be sure that the way to victory over our adversary is indicated in this parting prayer of our Lord's, 'Father, forgive them: they know not what they do.'

But to go to another last word of the great Sufferer. There were crucified with Him two thieves, malefactors, men guilty of great crimes, and doomed to suffer; not as He was for no fault or offence of His own, but for just and sufficient cause.

And one of these railed on him, 'If thou be Christ, save thyself and us!' But the other, a man of a better spirit, rebuked his fellow: 'Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation. And we indeed justly; for we receive the just reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss.' And then addressing himself to Jesus, he gave Him His true title, 'Lord,' and begged, with a wonderful faith in His final victory, that He would be mindful of him

hereafter: 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom! And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise!'

Those were the second words of Jesus Christ upon the cross. And in those words He claims the power and privilege of a King, of one Mighty to save, to save the soul alive, from the bitter pains of eternal death. *This day*, in spite of all its present horror and humiliation, 'This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise!' At rest, in peace, where no torment can reach, in the abode of the blessed dead; where those who sleep in the Lord enjoy perpetual rest and felicity!

That was His promise to the penitent thief,—a very precious promise, and one much to be treasured in our hearts. For it tells us two things. It tells us that Jesus Christ has power in another world—that He is Lord of the dead—that He can and does appoint a place for such as love Him after they have died, in which to rest free from all grief and pain, till the day of their happy resurrection. And, further, it tells us that He is ready to listen to the sighing of any contrite heart, ready to save a sinner, yea, even when at his last gasp.

I would not, brethren, that we should reckon on such a deliverance. I would not that any man should put off repentance, and trust to his dying hour to make his peace with God. That, indeed,

would be most dangerous. But neither would I underrate the great support and comfort which there surely is for all penitent sinners in these words of our Lord to the dying thief.

It is a striking fact—it is a fact full of matter for serious thought, that the gracious Saviour, almost with His last breath, accepted the prayer of this poor, though justly condemned criminal. In so doing He showed in a most touching way that His mission on earth was, above all things, to save sinners,—aye, the chiefest of sinners!

With that example before us, we feel sure that no man need despair; that nothing but our own hardness and impenitence of heart need stop the way of our being saved.

Let there be but a softening there—a sorrow for having sinned, a firm belief in the efficacy of Christ's atoning blood. Let there be a casting of ourselves upon Him, a coming to Him with the sighing of a contrite spirit. Let there be this prayer, 'Lord, remember me:' aye, even such an one as me! and we are encouraged to hope that we shall not sue in vain! Those words, 'This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise,' like the words spoken to the returning prodigal, spoken by the same lips, assure us that He is ready to receive us,—yea, at our last moment; and most willing to pardon us if we come to Him with faithful repentance!

The next words recorded as spoken on the cross are the words related in chap. xix. 25–7, of St. John: 'There stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas; and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother!' The words,—these few tender words, were at once understood. The apostle looked upon them as a bequest from His Master to shelter and support His virgin mother. 'And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.'

Now, how full is this of instruction! The dying Saviour is still up to His last moments the dutiful and loving son. His own dreadful agonies are forgotten in His desire to lessen His mother's sorrow. In that hour of His own great desolation He prepares for her one to comfort her—one to protect her—one to discharge towards her what He could no longer discharge, the duties of a son: 'Woman, behold thy son! Disciple, behold thy mother!'

What a truly human message! What a proof that the Divine Sufferer was touched with a feeling of our infirmities! And what a lesson does it teach to all aftertime of the respect and honour due to parents!

Think of it, brethren; think of it ye especially whose parents are still living.

We are told under the old covenant to honour our father and mother. It is God's first commandment with promise. And now at the moment of the sealing of a new and better covenant, just as the 'blood of sprinkling' that purgeth the conscience from dead works is being shed; at this awful instant comes forth an utterance from the Mediator of the new covenant, which binds with yet firmer bonds this foremost duty on our souls.

Think, I say, often of that utterance — those few short words of Jesus Christ betokening the care and thought He took for His mother. And as you would have Him for your Saviour, as you would hope to be confessed and recognised by Him for His hereafter, see that in this point you make Him your example; see that you learn of Him to show piety at home,—to love, honour, and succour your father and mother.

The next words to which I will briefly call your attention are perhaps the most awful of all that the Lord spoke during His six hours' anguish. We find them in St. Matt. xxvii. 46.

There had been a great horror of unusual darkness over the land, lasting from midday for three hours — from the sixth to the ninth hour — as if Nature sympathized with the sorrow of her Lord.

'And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'

These are the opening words of the 22nd Psalm—a psalm appointed for this day's service. They tell of a state of great spiritual desolation. They tell of a soul abandoned by its chief support. They tell of a soul sinking into the deep mire, where no ground was, left and forsaken of its God!

And could such, you will ask, be the condition of the Holy Jesus? Could He, who claimed to be one with the Great Father, who said He had only to pray to His Father, and that He would presently give Him more than twelve legions of angels,—could Jesus Christ ever feel as if God had forsaken Him?

The Scripture says that He did. Nay, the Scripture says that it was necessary—that He was to taste the desolation of death, and not only that, but the desolation of a sinner's death; that He was to be made a curse for us; to feel in our stead the righteous anger of God against sin!

I see not how else we can account for these terrible, heart-rending words, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' We believe—with reverence be it said—that at the moment the Holy One was expiating our guilt, treading the

wine-press of the wrath of God,—treading it alone —drinking to the dregs the cup of trembling— bearing in His own body our sins—finding and feeling the recompense of man's transgression— being made sin for us—sin which He Himself had never, in the slightest form, committed, but the wages of which He must receive!

If this be so, what a glimpse do we obtain of the hatefulness of sin—sin which needed such an atonement! Fools make a mock at sin; yes, and people who are not fools, shrewd and sensible people, often think and speak lightly of sin, find in it matter for an idle jest.

But, brethren, we will not go with them in this. We will not think that a light thing which wrung from the sinless Christ that awful cry. Sin, we will resolve, shall ever seem to us a very serious matter —a thing to be wept for, and repented of, utterly renounced and forsaken. Sin shall never seem anything to us but 'exceeding sinful;' that which, if persisted in, must separate us wholly and entirely from the love of God—destroy both body and soul in hell!

A little further in St. John's narrative we find another last word of our Lord's (xix. 28): 'Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.'

This He said, not so much as seeking relief for

Himself, but in order to carry out every particular of the prophecies that went before concerning Him. In one of these (in Ps. lxix.) it had been written, 'They gave me gall to eat, and when I was thirsty they gave me vinegar to drink.' The Lord remembered this; and 'that the Scripture might be fulfilled,' He said the word, 'I thirst.' 'Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar,'—it was the sour wine, the common drink of the Roman soldiers—'and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink.'

That was one of many proofs of our Lord's care and regard for the Holy Scriptures; even in His agony He thought on God's word, and provided that not one jot or tittle of it should go unfulfilled, took care that all obstacles should be removed which might stand in man's way to recognise Him in His true character as the long promised Deliverer, the Messiah that was to come, by not leaving out any single particular of the things that were written of Him.

There is yet one last word of Christ on the cross that I would touch upon before I conclude—one very significant one—also recorded in St. John, xix. 30: 'When Jesus had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished, and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.'

'It is finished'—it is over—it is ended—it is accomplished!'

And do you ask what? The sufferings, the torture, the long bodily agony — that was over. Yes; but was that all? was nothing else ended, finished, accomplished? Oh, surely this also, our Redemption, was obtained. The one sacrifice of that One Holy, Just Person was accepted as sufficient.

And the Lord knew that it was accepted. He died conscious that He had done His great task; He died seeing of the travail of His soul, satisfied that He had not died in vain. 'It is finished!' I have done the work which My Father gave Me to do; I have made it just for God to forgive sinners; I have obtained eternal redemption for mankind; I have not left anything to be supplied; I have wrought out a full and free salvation!

Surely the words 'It is finished,' convey all this. They furnish us with a safe standing-place for time and eternity. There remains now no more offering for sin; there only remains to remember with all thankfulness the perfect work of the one Redeemer, and to profit by it; there only remains to bless God that He has given us such an all-sufficient Saviour, and to draw near to Him in faith, trusting to the finished redemption He has wrought for us. 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus: by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His

flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering; for He is faithful that promised: and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.' Heb. x. 19.

XIII.

EASTER DAY.

'Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'—Ps. xxx. 5, part.

Of all days in the Christian year, Easter Day ought to be the most joyful. It comes at the end of Lent, at the close of a season which, from very early times, has been set apart for humiliation. It comes at the end of that week in which we have the rehearsal of our blessed Lord's bitter grief; and it comes with a message powerful to dispel all gloom, it comes bearing in its very name hope, and light, and consolation, and blessing!

'Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'

First, then, of the cause of our joy. We rejoice because of the Resurrection, because Jesus Christ is not in the grave; because, according to His own words, 'after three days,' He has risen, burst the bonds of death, and in so doing opened unto us the gate of everlasting life!

That is the cause of our Easter joy. And here,

at this moment of our great gladness, let us look back and recall the state of gloom, anxiety, and misgiving, out of which this day has delivered us. Let us recall the past night of heaviness, first, as it affected the disciples; secondly, as it affects ourselves.

And, first, as regards the disciples, the personal friends and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. How fared it with them when their Lord was taken from them, after they had seen Him die? It was a time, we are sure, of intense sorrow. Their hope died with Christ upon the cross: they trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel. But how could that trust now remain? His enemies had prevailed; His own great power had failed. The Saviour of others, He had not been able to save Himself. They mourned Him, they lamented Him, they helped to take Him down from the cross; they saw Him laid with all reverence and tender care in Joseph's new tomb; but not one of the whole band, not one single person who had been with Him and had seen what He suffered, seems to have had any hope that their Lord would be restored to them alive.

He was indeed still most dear to them, and still their minds dwelt upon Him. The women of their company spent the Sabbath, *i.e.*, the Saturday after Good Friday, in preparing spices and ointments for embalming His body. But all the while

it was as of one dead that they thought of Him and spoke of Him; all the while their hearts were aching for the loss of the living voice which they must no more hear, and for the kindly look which must no more shine upon them and comfort them.

So passed the Sabbath. The next day (our Easter Day), very early in the morning, the women hasten to the sepulchre, Mary Magdalen before the rest, while it was yet dark. And what does she see?—the stone rolled away, and the sepulchre empty—empty of the Lord's body, but not empty altogether. 'Two angels were sitting there, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.' They say unto her, and to those with her, 'Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; He is not here: behold the place where they laid Him.'

Then, for the first time, the cloud began to break. Then was their heaviness turned into joy; and that joy was confirmed, heightened to its highest pitch by the actual appearance of the risen Saviour to Mary Magdalen and to St. Peter, and to the other apostles. There were, it is true, in some, still, doubts and misgivings, but they were the doubts and misgivings, not of unbelieving, but of believing and loving hearts—hearts that feared too easily to conclude that to be true which of all things they most desired.

Once, however, perfectly assured — once satisfied that it was the Lord Himself, and no delusion — no ghost which they had seen — and He mercifully gave them every proof of His being the same — once assured of this, and they entered into perfect rest: they had joy and peace such as no after trial, trouble, or persecution, could ever take away.

So far of the fulfilment of the words of my text as they apply to Christ's disciples. The night of heaviness, which fell with so thick a gloom upon them when their dear Lord was crucified, dead, and buried, was dispelled, and dispelled for ever by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Let us note, in the second place, the application of the text to ourselves.

Our state in the world is a state of trial, of proving, of discipline for the life to come. Such a state can never be a state of rest, or ease, or joy, but always a state of anxiety, labour, more or less of sadness — a state that calls for watchfulness and a constant struggle with our besetting sin, and the mortifying of the deeds of the flesh, and patient continuance in well-doing. 'We now'—and this is true, not of one but of all—'we now are in heaviness, through manifold temptations.'

But, brethren, it is not for long. It is but for a season—a few short years at the most—and then,

if we come well out of our trial—if we persevere unto the end—we are saved! There is a rest and an inheritance reserved in another world—never doubt it—reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet. i. 5.) 'Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'

And why do I say this? What right have I to say this? On what ground do I assert that this short life of toil, and care, and trouble, will be succeeded by a 'Sabbath of Eternity'—a state of God at present? Why? Because of the tidings of Easter. Because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead—because He is gone before to prepare a place for His people—a place in His Father's house—a place in heaven; and because where He is, there shall His servants be.

But some may ask, Granted the truth of this —granted that Jesus Christ is risen — how does that prove that we also shall rise?

And indeed it is not an idle question. It is one that ought to have an answer. And the answer is —that as Jesus Christ died for all, so did He rise again for all; that the power of His resurrection extends to the whole human race of which He is the Head and the Redeemer.

'As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.' Because He liveth—He, the Head

—we, His members, shall live also. 'But every man in his own order; Christ the first-fruits—afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming.'

But if this be the case—and I refer you to the Bible in proof of what I have said—is not our heaviness indeed turned into joy? Is there anything that earth can give us of its best and brightest to compare for a moment with the certainty that we now have of a resurrection from the dead?

Nothing! brethren, nothing!—not if we once fully admit into our minds what this word resurrection means, both what it brings to us of good, and what it takes away from us of evil. For think, for a short moment, on both.

And, first, of the evil which the Resurrection takes away. It takes away that most depressing thought, which so many things tend to suggest—that we are but creatures of a day,—made to spend a few years on the earth—toiling, struggling, suffering—and then to drop into the grave, and cease at all to be!

I call that a most depressing thought,—crushing all high endeavour,—dragging us down to the level of the brutes that perish.

It is one which has tormented many a man's mind in those days when the light of Revelation had not yet shone.

It need not, however, torture our minds. If it

does, if at any time we feel creeping over us a panic fear that this life is all—that once dead, we are dead for ever—that they are dead for ever whom we knew face to face in the flesh—our companions, our kinsmen, our near and dear friends—if, I say, we ever feel this fear, we have now—blessed be God!—a remedy against it. Christ risen is a pledge that we shall rise; He by dying hath destroyed death, and by rising again hath restored to us everlasting life! He that raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus! 'If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.' (Rom. viii. 11.) And again, 'Our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.' (Philip. iii. 20, 21.)

Yes! for one and the other, for the evil and for the good, this is now the law, to live again—to live though we die.

The texts I have quoted refer mainly to the resurrection of the happy dead—to such as shall have died in the Lord, who before they died, while they were alive, were leavened with His Spirit.

But other Scriptures tell us that all men will

rise again—that at an appointed hour 'all who are in their graves shall come forth'—not, indeed, all to the same lot of happiness—the lot of God's true people. 'They that have done good shall come forth to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation!'

But further. This knowledge that we shall rise again, alarming as it must be to the sinner yet in his sins, brings with it, if we be leading Christian lives, many inestimable blessings. It consoles us for any hardship in our lot now. If we be poor in this world's goods, it gives us the hope of possessing what is better than great riches of the ungodly. It soothes us in our rough journey here by the prospect of the rest hereafter. It preaches to us patience if we are in affliction—humility to us if we are proud—moderation to us if we are greedy. It reminds us, if we have worldly wealth, to use it well, laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come!

But, undoubtedly, the chiefest blessing of all that we obtain from the knowledge of the Resurrection is the comfort that it gives us, when all other comforts fail, in seasons of bereavement.

It is hard, most hard to be parted from those we love—those with whom our days are chiefly spent—who share our most intimate thoughts, counsels, plans, cares, toils, and pleasures—those, too, with whom we have fellowship in religion—

who walk with us to God's house as friends—who kneel with us at the Lord's Table—in short, from all with whom the link—be it of family, or kindred, or friendship, or neighbourhood, or mutual interest, or fellow-feeling, or religion—that binds us together is close and strong.

It is hard, I say, very hard, when that bond is broken. The heart even of the strongest aches at the separation. In some cases many days, many years, must go by before we cease to feel a pang of anguish at the recollection of our loss. The very mention of some cherished name, or relationship, brings with it a renewal of our grief.

But neither is this sorrow without alleviation. We can bear it, and do bear it bravely, when the thought of a resurrection is present to comfort us. With a sure belief in another life, and joined with that belief the hope of our re-union, we lift up our head and dry our tears, and go about our work as before, and abide patiently our own call. Nay, we do more; we give God thanks that it hath pleased Him to deliver our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world. We feel it is better with the dead than with ourselves, inasmuch as their warfare is accomplished—their crown won; while with us the strife is yet raging, and the issue of the battle still uncertain!

And now, in concluding. I have tried to show what great cause we have for rejoicing on Easter

Day,—what unspeakable benefits have come to us, and to all mankind, through our blessed Lord's Resurrection.

Will that joy be diminished—will it not be greatly heightened — if we now, as many as are devoutly disposed, gather round His table, who hath done for us such glorious things?

He has, you will admit, the strongest claim upon our attendance there. It is our bounden duty as true members of His Church to communicate of all days in the year on Easter Day.

'The snares of death compassed us round about, and the pains of hell gat hold upon us; we found trouble and heaviness.' From those snares—from that trouble and heaviness, we are now set free. He hath delivered our souls from death, our feet from falling. We walk before God in the land of the living!

Is it a great thing, brethren,—is it not the least thing we can do—the smallest return we can make for all these benefits; if we now receive the cup of salvation in obedience to the dying charge of our Benefactor? if we now draw near to our Lord in the way He has appointed us, and eat of that bread, and drink of that cup, which are at once the tokens of His redeeming love and the pledge to assure us thereof?

XIV.

EARLY DEATH.

Man that is born of a woman is of a few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.'—Job, xiv. 1, 2.

THESE are, perhaps, as old as any recorded words in the world. They are the words of Job, a man that feared God and eschewed evil, who lived in the land of Uz at least as early as the days of Moses—probably about 1500 years B.C.

And these old words from that day till now have kept their freshness. We living in the nineteenth century after the birth of our Lord, in a country wholly unlike that Chaldæan land where Job lived, of a different race, with different ideas, and a different language, and different bringing up, yet repeat continually these words of the wise and thoughtful, as well as patient Job.

They form, you know, a part of our Burial Service, that most solemn part which is said at the side of the grave, and while the corpse is being made ready to be laid into the earth.

Then it is, in a moment of most trying sorrow, when the dear load is just about to be let down

and hid out of sight, when not the kinsmen only of the deceased, but all who stand by as spectators, are joined by a cord of sympathy into one band of mourners, that we hear addressed to us by God's minister these reflections of Job upon the shortness and sadness of human life. 'Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay!'

Other words follow, words of acknowledgment of sin, words of earnest entreaty to be delivered, to be kept firm in our faith, steadfast to God in our last hour.

But with these we are not concerned at present. It is to the language of Job in the text that I now wish to invite your attention. The words I have said are familiar to us. We have had occasion twice within a few weeks to use them; and both times they were spoken in the same ears, to the same sad group of sorrowing mourners.

Let us then look at what they tell us, and, sad and depressing as at first they sound, let us consider whether they do not hide within them some consolatory thought suited to assuage in some small degree the anguish of aching hearts that are amongst us.

Job, you will see, places very forcibly before us the shortness and precariousness of human life.

'Man that is born of a woman is of a few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.'

There is something very touching in this comparison of the life of man to the coming forth and quick withering away of a flower. And we ourselves can all bear witness to the truth of the simile. How rapidly at this spring season do the flowers in our gardens come forth! Look at the lily how it grows,—what progress does it make in a single night! To-day it was but just out of the ground, to-morrow it will be some inches tall, at the end of the week it will be in bud! We notice it yearly with a sort of wonder; it grows, we say, as if by magic. And quick as it is in its growth, so quick is it in its decline. For a few days it charms us with its fair beauty, and then a change comes over it, and the flower thereof falleth and the grace, the fashion of it perisheth!

Or even before that, before its natural time of decay, there comes a storm of April rain, and the lily is dashed, and the stem is broken, and it lies on the ground no more to rise. The wind has swept over it, and it is gone, and the place where it grew, and which it adorned, knoweth it no more!

I repeat it, my brethren, we can with our own experience confirm the words of Job in the text, both in what he says of the shortness and pre-

cariousness of man's life. Each time we hear his words we bethink us of some one—it may be some one in our own family—whose too short stay amongst us is just what he describes. He or she cometh forth like a flower, and like a flower is cut down,—in the morning, green and growing up—in the evening, a few hours, a few days later, cut down, dried up, and withered!

And these things move us, as is natural. We grieve more for the broken flower than we do at the fall of the ripe fruit—for that which dies after it has fulfilled its time; we grieve more for the quenching of a youthful life than we do for the life that has burned out into the socket. Brief as man's time is at the most we grudge to see that short space curtailed. 'I am deprived of the residue of my years,' said King Hezekiah as he lay on his sick bed like unto one at the point to die. 'I am deprived of the residue of my years!' 'He will cut me off with pining sickness,' cut me off as a weaver cuts the thread from the thrum, suddenly, before it be all spun out! And so do we say, so do we in our hearts complain when the 'desire of our eyes,' the dear child whose growth we had lovingly watched and tended is taken from us, and the thread of its young life prematurely snapped, —'He is deprived of the residue of his years!'

My brethren, I cannot blame you for such grief. God who made us, made us with human

hearts. Quick to feel the loss of our kindred; quick to melt into pity for our brother in affliction. He is not to be commended—he is rather to be reproached as hard and unfeeling, who is nothing moved by the daily spectacles of mortality which meet our view—who can pass by a funeral, and especially the funeral of a young person, and not catch from the accompanying mourners some contagion of their sorrow!

Being what we are, of whatever nation, kindred, or tongue, of whatever creed, it would be surprising, unnatural, unlovely, did we not lament for the young; did we not, when their death occurs in our own circle, give vent to nature in bitter tears of regret; did we not, when there is no such link of kindred, yet feel for our neighbour's trouble, and wish, if we might, to comfort him concerning those that are asleep!

But how shall we comfort them? What can we say that will not seem cold, and trite, and common-place, when addressed to sorrowing hearts, sorrowing, like Rachel for her children, because they are not,—sorrowing for those who die young!

I grant and feel the difficulty. But something, I trust, may yet be said: something should be said by Christ's ministers, that by God's blessing may help to this end, help to soothe the parents in their grief—help to reconcile them to that which seems

now, so hard to bear, the early vanishing of a beloved face from their home!

First, then, there is this to be considered—that life, human life, as it is at present, is at the best a mixture of good and evil; and that the evil in only too many lives preponderates—'Man that is born of a woman is of a few days, and full of trouble.' 'Man is born unto trouble' as surely 'as the sparks fly upwards.' As life lengthens that trouble increases. The joy of life is, for the most part, in our first years. No matter what be our condition, there are none so joyous as the young. The young, it is true, do not know their own happiness. They are ever eager to advance a stage — to be grown men and women. But when they reach that wished-for point they find that they are mistaken. Years do not commonly bring the expected good. They but too often bring the contrary. The freshness and freedom from care that we had in our first years is gone; and in their place has come labour, and anxiety, and a heart troubled about many things. Yes; and worse evils than these come with added years. The chiefest sins are generally those which are committed not before, but after we have grown up. God knows that sin besets our steps all our course! God knows that the youth may stumble and fall as well as his elders! But it is as I have said, as we grow older, that we often grow more hardened in sin, are

guilty of greater and more presumptuous transgression.

And this is a danger from which early death saves many a soul. Let the parent who mourns his child lay it to heart. You grieve for him or her who is gone—but consider what life is! how it is full of pit-falls, full of perils, full of every sort of trouble! May it not be that your son or daughter is taken away from the evil to come? May it not be that it is happier with them than with ourselves? As things are, you have comfort in the thought that your child is at peace—safe in the Saviour's keeping—where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. But if he had lived, if he had grown up, and then left off to behave himself wisely, and gone astray, and done wickedly, as, alas! so many do who are spared for a longer time, in that case would not your sorrow be sharper, less admitting of comfort than it does now? Believe me, more pain and anguish may be caused to a parent by the misconduct of a favourite child than even by its premature death! There are cases, not a few, when the father and mother brooding in sadness over some prodigal son, or some fallen daughter, find themselves repeating the very words which the Lord once spoke of His apostate follower, 'It had been good for this man if he had not been born!'

Such are some obvious grounds on which to

build comfort when our home is made desolate by the withdrawal of some dear child. It is something to feel that whatever be our anguish, it is well with the child! That for him or for her, the warfare is accomplished; that Satan cannot now pluck the soul out of the Saviour's hand; that it is where no torment can touch it; that it has reached the quiet haven—can never more be tempest-tossed—in danger of suffering shipwreck while passing, as we are still passing, the waves of this troublesome world!

Yes, it is a thought to comfort us! If life is shortened, so are life's troubles shortened—so are life's dangers—so are life's temptations! And who that knows how great these are—who that has had experience of the evils of life—the evils of mature life—would wish to recall, if he might, a spirit that has got free, that is clear escaped from such evils, as a bird out of the fowler's net? 'The snare, we say, is broken, and he is delivered!'

Once more. Think this also, and take comfort from it. Whatsoever happens to man happens by the will and ordering of His Maker. 'Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining, as youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness.' It is not for us to fix when and how we shall die, any more than it is to fix when and how we shall be born. It rests with Him who is the great Disposer of all things. God who breathes into us the breath of life, assigns to us a

limit that we cannot pass. To some He gives a long life, to some a short life, to some barely to live at all. But all is for the best, all is in accordance with His divine wisdom. In what He does, He has—could we but see it—our welfare in view. If He afflicts us by taking away our child, He does not afflict willingly. He has a purpose of mercy in what He does. He dealeth with us as with sons—for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?

Let us then bear, as Christians should, what is laid upon us. Let us not indulge too much our grief. Let us not be found to be murmurers at God's appointment. You will remember an example set us in the Bible of self-restraint under similar sorrow. While the royal child was yet alive, while there was yet hope that it might recover, the father besought God for its life. 'He fasted and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.' But when God disposed otherwise—when the child died, 'then David arose from the earth, and washed and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped.' For he reasoned, and wisely reasoned, after this sort:—'While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me!'

Now think of that example, recorded no doubt for our learning, and learn from David to moderate your grief for the dead—aye, for those who die young!

Think of his wise words, 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.' Read them and ponder them under the light of Christian revelation,—that revelation which has brought life and immortality to light.

You will rejoin your child. You shall go to him. You and he, in God's good time will once more be together—together in the silent kingdom of the dead—together when that silence is broken; and the earth shall yield up her dead—the dead that lie around this church, whose graves we see and know by name—and the dead whose graves we see not—who lie not in their native land—who lie afar off in the stranger's soil, separated from us by the wide sea; and yet not separated from our hope; who equally with the dead at home rest secure of their resurrection!

Oh, think of that meeting, when we shall once more see one another, and know one another; and strive and pray that when it comes you and your child may never more be put asunder! Strive and pray that you may stand together in the same lot —alike accepted of God in Jesus Christ—alike partakers of a most blessed resurrection.

XV.

THE WORD THAT SAVES.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

'Receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.'—St. James, i. 21, part.

THUS concludes the Epistle for this fourth Sunday after Easter. It is an exhortation as to the proper spirit in which we should listen to God's word. 'Receive with meekness the engrafted, or implanted, word;' and further it contains a statement as to the value and importance of God's holy word, 'which is able to save your souls!'

And, first, as to the proper spirit in which we should listen to God's word. We make in our Litany this petition to Him:—'That it may please Thee to give to all Thy people increase of grace to hear meekly Thy Word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.'

And this petition agrees well with the first part of my text. If we are to receive the word of God to our profit, the power so to receive it must come to us from God. He must give us grace to hear meekly His word, and to receive it with pure affection. And that grace He will not deny to any who seek it in earnest, humble prayer.

But how few do seek it? How few when the prayer I have just quoted from the Litany, is put up, ever make it as it were their own especial request! How few think at all about the state of mind and heart in which they should hear and receive God's holy word!

For how is it with most of us? Sunday comes, and we are glad of it—and our labour pauses, and we have at last after six days' toil a little space for rest. And the church-bell chimes, and we get ready —some of us—to attend church. We set off, and our friends walk with us, talking of many things, our hearts still occupied with week-day cares and pleasures, our tongues still busy with the same theme. And we reach the church, and we come in, and our talk ceases, and we take our seats, and we bow our head, and seem to be offering a short prayer. But who prays in earnest the prayer of the Litany, 'To hear meekly God's word?' who prays as for a thing he really needs, that is really important to him—that God would give him grace to profit by his attendance at church,—that God would give him grace to pray along with the minister, and to say a hearty Amen to his giving of thanks; or that God would give him grace to set forth His praise with the best power of tongue and heart that he possesses, and finally that God would give him grace to hear His most holy word in a

teachable and humble spirit, with a hearty desire to do as it directs him?

Alas! I fear, but only a few do this. And yet surely such is the way to get good by our attendance here; the only way. God's word will not dwell in an unprepared heart. It may rest on it for a little moment. Any particularly striking sentence may catch the ear, and settle for an instant on the surface of the heart. But if the heart is careless, if it has not been got ready, if it is not kept and guarded by God's grace, the seed dropped will not remain. The birds of the air, the quick flitting, winged, worldly thoughts will pounce upon it, and devour it, and the poor unprepared hearer will be none the richer nor the wiser for what he has heard.

Lest this be the case, let us take care to bring with us into this Holy House well prepared and sober, serious hearts. Let us be as quiet and still as may be in our walk to church. Let us pray, ere we sit down, that we may 'receive with meekness the engrafted word.' Let our attitude be, when seated, that of watchful learners, persons who look to God's holy word for instruction; who, while they sit with seriousness of face and manner in their places before God's minister, seem to be saying, by their very countenance, what good Cornelius said for himself and for his household before the apostle, 'Now therefore are we all here

present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.'

So far then of the exhortation on the text, 'Receive with meekness the engrafted word,' let us go on to consider the statement,—the important statement in it, about the power of God's word,—'which is able to save your souls.'

The word of God is here described, and described in other places of Scripture, as a chief agent in the great work of man's salvation. It saves souls alive. It saves them from the death of sin. It saves them from the deadly sleep of indifference and worldliness. It saves them from the yawning gulf of despair. It saves them from the crafts and assaults of our great enemy, from him who is ever prowling about seeking whom he may devour. It saves them from the opposite perils of over-confidence, and mistrust. It saves them in their extreme need, at the eleventh hour. It saves them when they have gone astray like sheep that are lost. It saves them when they are sick, and at the point to die, when they suffer God's terrors with a troubled mind.

In short, the word of God has that wonderful power in it, that in all the greatest dangers and necessities of the soul, it can give help, and bring relief. It is able, when not rejected and disregarded, when received meekly and thankfully, to save the soul alive; 'to save souls alive,'—not the

soul of a few favoured ones, but the soul of every man who seeks in its pages the means of being saved. For the word of God is not bound, it is not restricted and limited in its operation; it reaches to all alike without distinction of person, to all alike it brings, when received with meekness, health, and healing, and guidance, and counsel, and instruction in righteousness and salvation.

There is no doubt about this. God's word is life and enlightenment, and has been proved to be this in innumerable instances, ever since it was revealed to mankind.

And what—it will be asked—is this Word of God which is charged with such great benefit to man? In its widest sense, it is the whole Bible. But in the sense of the Apostle in this text, it is, I think, the word of the New Covenant—the revelation of Jesus Christ, 'Who gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father;' it is 'the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you!' (1 Pet. i. 25.)

That is what I understand by the Word of God that saves souls alive. That message of love, of peace, of reconciliation, of true deliverance, which is addressed to us in the gospel—'the word which God sent,' first of all, 'unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ;' the word that tells of a Saviour—tells us of One who came

down from Heaven, and took our nature upon Him, and died for our sins upon the cross—died for this end, that He might make atonement for us, might be 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;' and Who, though He died, rose again from death, and lives now, exalted at God's right hand, a Prince and a Saviour, our Mediator, our Advocate with the Father,—'able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.' (Heb. vii. 25.)

That surely is the Word that saves—saves, as I have said, in all extremity,—saves the soul of the sinner, the penitent sinner that hears it and receives it, from despair, from darkness, from the bitter pains of eternal death.

Does, then, any one here ask the anxious question—ask it in earnestness, and because he wants to have an answer,—'What shall I do to be saved?' I, a poor, lost, sinful man, laden with the weight,—the felt weight of my sins. The answer is, as of old, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' Believe, and be sure that He 'of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' Believe that He, for His great work, for what He did and suffered, has been very highly exalted, lifted up to the highest seat in heaven, on purpose that He

may give repentance unto His people and remission of sins.

Yes; believe on Jesus Christ in thine heart, and confess Him with thy mouth! Confess Him in that most solemn service soon about to be performed,—the service of the Holy Communion. Go there, brethren, that you may show forth the Lord's death in the way He has appointed you to show it; and show that your own soul's hope is in what that death has obtained—that you look to be saved only by the merits and death of Jesus Christ, and through faith in His most precious blood. Go, I say,—go gladly to your Lord's Table, that you may bear open witness that He is your Saviour, your all-sufficient Saviour, that your hope and trust, your refuge and reliance, is only and entirely in Him.

Yes, go to the Lord's Table, and go whenever you have an opportunity—to manifest your faith, to make clear where your heart is—Whom it is you love, and in Whom you believe. But see that your faith, your belief, in this great Saviour, acts, as it must do if it is true living faith — upon your practice. Beware of a barren belief, of a mere lip-faith. See that your faith is a fruit-bearing faith, that it affects and influences your whole life and conversation, that it not only draws you to the Lord's Table, but compels and constrains you to walk with Jesus in His way.

Happy are they whose faith is thus operative for good. For they who walk in His way walk at liberty. They are set free from many a snare, many an alluring sin. The path they tread is the path of safety. It may be rough, and steep, and narrow, but it leadeth unto life. They who keep that path shall come at length to where their Forerunner hath already entered, and know Him, and be known of Him, and dwell with Him; where true joys are to be found, in the light and happiness of heaven!

XVI.

GODS OF GOLD.

'Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold.'—Exod. xxxii. 31.

WE are reading in the order of the first Sunday lesson those chapters of the book of Deuteronomy which contains Moses' exhortation to the Israelites: the words he addressed to them on the desert side of Jordan, in the valley over-against Beth-peor, after they were come forth out of Egypt.

In that exhortation Moses deals very plainly with the Israelites. He dwells much upon their acts of disobedience. He sets repeatedly before them the many provocations wherewith they had provoked God's wrath against them, and brought down His punishments during their forty years' wandering. 'Remember,' he says, Deut. ix., 'and forget not how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness!'

And as the head and chief of their provocation, Moses reminds them of what they did in Horeb while he was absent from them in the mount; how they made a calf in those days, and worshipped the molten image; turned their glory into the

similitude of a brute beast, a calf that eateth hay; and forgat God their Saviour; how for this they were punished—would have been utterly destroyed had not he interceded for them, stood in the gap between them and their God, to turn away His wrathful displeasure lest He should destroy them. 'And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you. But the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also.' And then he goes on to say, how he had dealt with the idol. 'I took your sin, the calf which ye had made, and burnt it with fire, and stamped it, and ground it very small, even until it was as small as dust: and I cast the dust thereof into the brook that descended out of the mount.' (Deut. ix. 18–21.)

In the account in Exodus, xxxii., whence my text is taken, we hear more of this great sin, and of the punishment of the Israelites because of it. Moses, we are told, caused the idolaters to be put to death. The Levites were the executioners of the sentence. 'They did according to the word of Moses, and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.'

And yet the pollution of this great offence was

not wiped away. 'Moses said unto the people, ye have sinned a great sin, and now I will go up unto the Lord: peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold! Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written. And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.'

Such is an outline of the history of the golden calf. There is much, be assured, for us to learn from it,—much that may serve for our warning.

And, first, of the sin itself. 'Oh, this people have sinned a great sin; they have made them gods of gold.' So Moses describes the offence of the Israelites. He calls their sin 'a great sin.' And such undoubtedly it was, but perhaps not so exceeding great as at first sight it must appear. The Israelites, in making and worshipping the golden calf, did not intend to forsake the Lord. They meant still to be His people and still to worship Him, but in a way that was wrong—under the

likeness of the figure which they had made. They had seen that figure worshipped in Egypt. It was familiar to them as an emblem of the Deity. To us, indeed, it appears monstrous to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver graven by art or man's device, because we have long been taught better. But these Israelites were only just beginning to be taught better. They had lived four hundred years in the midst of a people who worshipped idols, where they had daily seen this figure of a heifer carved on the walls of the Egyptian temples. Besides, they were a timid, faint-hearted, distrustful people, made so by their long years of servitude and oppression. And now when Moses, their great leader, seemed to be lost to them, when he tarried long on the holy mount, they became frightened, and thought themselves forsaken, left without a guide in the waste wilderness. Was it to be wondered at if in their panic they turned back in thought into Egypt; if they remembered the figures of the Godhead they had seen there—on tomb, on pyramid, and temple—and this figure more especially of a heifer, everywhere an object of worship to the Egyptians, and, remembering it, should have said, as they did to Aaron, 'Up, make us Gods which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him?'

I do not excuse them for this, but it will ex-

plain to us the form which their offence took. That offence was not so much worshipping a false God as making an image to represent to them the true God.

And this Aaron should have prevented. He was Moses' brother. He was with him on the fiery, trembling mountain. He heard the words of God out of that fire, saying, 'Thou shalt not make to thee any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth, for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.' And yet, knowing better, he had not the courage to withstand the people in their panic. He did the thing they clamoured for. He made them a god of gold. He made it of that very gold which they had carried off from their taskmasters, the golden earrings and other jewels of which they had spoiled the Egyptians. He made it after the fashion they had seen in Egypt—a molten calf. And when it was made he set it before them as their visible God. 'These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.' And they did sacrifice before it, and rejoiced in the work of their hands.

They worshipped the calf thinking that in it and through it they were worshipping Jehovah. That was their sin, a trying to do what God had forbidden them; to bring down God out of His unapproachable seat, and to place Him in outward

form and shape visible before their eyes. They were not content to walk by faith; they would walk by sight. And so they corrupted themselves —departed from the simple grandeur of the pure religion they had been taught, the worship of the one unseen God, and made them a graven image, the likeness of a four-footed beast, to be to them in the stead of God.

There was, we have seen, some excuse for these poor Israelites in the long servitude of their Egyptian bondage. There can be no excuse for us, brethren, no excuse for any calling themselves Christians, if we admit under any pretence the worship of images in our religion.

And this is one great gulf that divides us from the Roman Church. In that Church image-worship is not only not forbidden, but encouraged. Not that they worship there an image for God, any more than the Israelites worshipped the calf for God. But they allow the use of images as helps to realize the presence of the Lord. And that in itself is a snare: contrary, we must think, to the plain command of God, 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image; nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them.'

We, perhaps, good Protestants, deem ourselves free from blame in this matter. And if we only

looked at the letter of this history we should have right so to do, for nothing is more abhorrent from our views of religion than the making of a graven or carved image to worship it. Long familiar with our English Bible, we have gained from it a fervent hatred of idolatry. The words of Moses in this book of Deuteronomy, the words of Isaiah, the words of the Psalmist, have taught us the vanity of images, of likening God to any figure that the art of man could carve or cast out of wood or stone, or gold or silver. We pride ourselves, not without truth, on having utterly broken off from the old superstitious practices which before the Reformation prevailed in our Church: and which still, as I have said, in a large portion of Christendom are to be found. And God forbid that we or our children should ever go back! God forbid that any plea for union with the old Church should find favour amongst us, so long as that Church retains and enjoins the use of images and other practices of superstition upon her members!

But let us not think that on this account we have nothing to learn from the history of the golden calf. There underlies that history, as there underlies so many other incidents in Jewish story, a deep, and real, and living spiritual lesson—a lesson good for us to ponder and take to heart. We cannot read the words of the text and miss that lesson: 'And Moses said, Oh, this people have

sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold!'

The worship of the golden calf! Who will say that this worship has no place amongst ourseves? Not, of course, the worship of the graven image, but the worship of that of which the image is made —the worship of gold. Who will deny this to be the case with us in England? Where more than in our land is wealth worshipped,—gold made more of an idol?

For what is an idol? A false god — a thing before which men bow down and obey; on whose altar they burn incense; to whom they bring gifts and offerings of their choicest and best.

And is not this what we do — what many of us do — before that common idol, Gold? It is like the huge image on the plains of Dura that Nebuchadnezzar set up. In front of it, and to do honour to it, all nations, peoples, and languages — and no nation, no people more conspicuously than ourselves — bow down and worship it.

It is the idol at whose shrine we burn incense, to which we pay incessant court, to which we do sacrifice continually, from whom we hold back nothing that is dear to us, neither son, nor daughter, nor our own soul, which we surrender, with all its powers and faculties, to serve in the idol's temple; to serve a life-long service in the

worship of the unrighteous Mammon, of the world's god, Money!

And while this is so, can it be said that we have no warning to take from what we read in the Bible of the worship of the golden calf?

We have surely this to learn from it — that God is a jealous God, and will not let us give His honour to another; that He claims from us the firstlings of our heart; that He will not let us overlook Him, nor neglect Him, for any visible earthly object of desire; that there is danger — great danger — lest when our worldly goods increase we set our hearts upon them, and forget the Lord our God.

The words of Moses in the lesson for the morning (Deut. viii.) enforce that warning. He bids us beware lest we forget our God through the absorbing effect of multiplied possessions. 'When thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied; and all that thou hast is multiplied, then beware, lest thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage!'

Yes; 'lest thou forget the Lord thy God,'—'lest thou lose sight of Him, and of the need thou hast of Him, in the abundance of thine earthly possessions!

That is the lesson, that is the warning that we in these days, when we read of Israel's idolatry, ought surely to lay to heart.

We are in no danger of imitating them in making carved figures to represent to us the High God. But we are in danger of imitating them in forgetfulness of God, in drawing off our hearts from Him and giving it to earthly objects; and this, in the language of Holy Scripture, is idolatry.

This is a danger to which, no doubt, a rich man is more exposed than a poor man. But, brethren, it is a danger that besets us all, and I cannot too earnestly caution you all against it.

The best caution is that which God Himself has been pleased to give us by the mouth of His dear Son: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.' Care not for poverty—care not if thy worldly goods are few, but care for this,—labour for this, that you may have treasure in heaven, that your heart may be where your Saviour Christ is gone before, that, poor in this world, you may be rich towards God.

That is Christ's counsel to us, and these are His apostle's words on the same subject: 'Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to com-

municate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.' (1 Tim. vi.)

What truly blessed and comfortable words! How should every rich man carry them ever in his heart!

For here a way is opened to him by which his wealth, his dangerous wealth, may be rendered not only harmless, but made of positive help and profit to him, made the means by which he may glorify God by doing good, and call down God's blessing upon him, and store up treasure against the last day,—treasure that will not be taken from him; 'a treasure in the heavens that faileth not: where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth,'—treasure that consists of Christian charity: of which these will be some of the component items: the hungry fed, the injured righted, the oppressed delivered, the orphan furnished with a home, the sick nursed and cared for, the widow comforted, the ignorant taught, the erring sought for and reclaimed, the Lord Himself served and ministered unto in the person of His poor and suffering brethren!

XVII.

BEFORE THE HOLY COMMUNION.

'Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar: and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' —St. Matt. v. 23, 24.

THERE are many aspects in which that Holy Feast to which you have been invited, and of which you are about, some of you, to partake, may be regarded. It may be regarded, first of all, and is so regarded in our Prayer-Book, as the memorial of our Lord's death—His cruel death upon the cross: 'As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come.' Each time we come to the Lord's Table we have visibly before us the Great Sacrifice once made for sinners on the cross. We have under the emblems of bread and wine—bread broken and wine poured out—a vivid representation of the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour, Jesus Christ, dying for us—giving us His body, holy, harmless, undefiled, to be bruised and broken for our sins upon the tree; and His blood—His

most precious blood—to be poured out, as was done on that day when He hung in agony, crucified between two thieves, and one of the soldiers with a spear 'pierced His side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water!'

That is one aspect of the Holy Sacrament. It is a most powerful and touching exhibition of the Lord's death. It brings back to our mind the deed done so many years ago on Calvary in the Jews' land. It points to Jesus Christ in the very act of redeeming us, 'Behold the Man!' See how He was marred,—see what was done unto Him in the day when He trod the wine-press alone, and God laid on Him the iniquity of us all!

And, my brethren, should not that which is the memorial of so awful an event have great attraction for us? Should not Christians delight to remember the exceeding great love of their Lord and Saviour thus dying for them, and the innumerable benefits which by His precious blood-shedding He hath obtained for them?

Should they need urging to do this?

Indeed, indeed, they should not. Were it not for the misunderstanding and prejudices which have clouded our views of this great subject—misunderstanding and prejudices the growth of years—I cannot but think that we should be more of one mind about it, and of one practice. And that whenever in any church the Feast was

spread, instead of leaving it to a few—often a very few—we should all with one consent, and as a thing of course, stop to partake of it. We should feel—to use the words of our Church's Exhortation—that 'as the Son of God did vouchsafe to yield up His soul by death upon the cross for our salvation, so it is our duty to receive the Communion in remembrance of the sacrifice of His death, as He Himself hath commanded.'

That, I repeat, is one, and must always be a most prominent aspect of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is the representation, the showing forth of the Lord's death—that death which has done such great things for mankind; that death which has destroyed death, which, from whatever point we look at it, is assuredly the event of the greatest consequence that has ever happened in our world—productive of the greatest blessings. That death is exhibited to us in this Sacrament in all its healing, saving, sin-killing power.

Shall we turn away from beholding it? Have we no wounds made in our souls by that old serpent the devil, that stand in need of healing, and for which Christ on the cross is the appointed Healer?

Shall He hang there, as it were, before our eyes, and we not even care to look at Him? Shall He appeal to us in the ancient words of the inspired prophet, 'Is it nothing to you all ye that

pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto Me!' —and we take no notice of His appeal? Oh, surely not. The love of Christ constraineth us. We cannot but feel that His great act of mercy ought to be had in remembrance.

'Remember Thee! and all Thy pains!
And all Thy love to me!
Yea, while a breath, a pulse remains,
Will I remember Thee!'

Again, another view of the Holy Communion is that which regards it as an especial means of grace—a means appointed by our Lord for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls.

This is a view of the Holy Supper on which I have often dwelt at other times, and I will not speak of it at length to-day. To those who are communicants it is unnecessary for me to point out what a great blessing the partaking of this sacrament surely is—how it strengthens and refreshes the soul. Nor need I do more than remind you all of the great words used by our Lord about it: 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.'

Such words in the 6th of St. John's Gospel must, we are sure, have a meaning, and a meaning that connects them with this Sacrament.

And so they are understood by our English Reformed Church—I say Reformed Church, because I cannot go with those who in these days advocate views about the Holy Communion which seem to me only too nearly to resemble those erroneous views which our forefathers renounced now more than three hundred years ago, when they separated from the Church of Rome.

I have no sympathy with such views; I see in their revival among us only too much cause for deep regret and concern; I believe them to be opposed alike to reason and to the Scriptures.

At the same time, brethren, I hold entirely to what our English Reformed Church teaches in her Articles and Prayer-Book on this solemn subject. I take her words for my guidance, as I am bound to do, in all that I have ever ventured to speak about it.

And what is that teaching? What does our English Church maintain on the subject of the Lord's Supper? It may best be gathered from the second part of the Church Catechism—the five last answers—and also from the Articles about the Sacraments, together with the service itself of the Holy Communion in our Prayer-Book. Anyone who will turn to those answers and Articles (XXV.

XXVIII., XXIX., XXX., XXXI.), and withal read carefully the Communion Service, will know more about the nature and benefit of the Holy Sacrament than he could perhaps learn in any other way.

But I will not dwell further on this. I wish to-day to set one other use of the Holy Communion before you—a use suggested by the words of my text, read in the Gospel for this Sunday (6th after Trinity).

The Supper of the Lord is a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves. It is this, and more. It is a great provocation to Christian love. We meet at the Lord's Table as members of Jesus Christ, and members in Him of one another. We meet there—if anywhere in this world of strife and sin—with hearts emptied of all envy, all malice, all unfriendliness, in charity with all men. We meet there to confess that Jesus Christ is our Master and our Example.

There is a feeling in all our hearts,—I speak, I am sure, of what is commonly the case—there is a feeling in all our hearts, who kneel together at the Lord's Table, of brotherly kindness, not only towards those who are present with us, but towards those who are absent—towards all men. We cannot, we feel, take the bread and the wine, which are the pledges and tokens of Christ's great love to ourselves, to any good, while we retain one spark

of enmity or ill-will towards any one. And so the Holy Supper becomes a means of advancing us in true charity, a great loosener of unkindness, a great fosterer of gentleness, and patience, and forbearance in our souls.

The charge in the text comes home to us at such a time, 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee. Leave there thy gift before the altar; go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.'

Yes: 'First be reconciled to thy brother.' This will ever be a leading thought with us at the time of Holy Communion. I must forgive, as I hope myself to be forgiven.

And it is on this account, not least of all, that I would urge you to be communicants. Other reasons I have given at other times when preaching on this subject, to show you the duty and blessedness of being partakers of the Holy Communion; other reasons will have occurred to you from what I have said this morning,—reasons arising from the nature of the ordinance and the weight of His authority who instituted it. But to-day let this single reason suffice to bring you to it. Come to 'the sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death,' because it has ever proved a most effectual bond of peace and good-will amongst Christians. Because, by so doing, the charity, the kindliness, the active desire

to do good, the forbearance, the tenderness of mind, of every one of you, will thereby be increased. Come because you cannot surely contemplate what that Holy ordinance holds up to view, the touching memorial and representation of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross, and not catch something of the great Sufferer's spirit—cannot take to yourselves the benefit of His death, full and free forgiveness of your own sins, of all that is past, without at the same time from your hearts forgiving your brother, without feeling powerfully, in a way not to be resisted, the obligation so often urged in the Gospel,—'Freely ye have received, freely give. . . Shouldest not thou also have compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?'

XVIII.

RIZPAH; OR, DEATH IN HARVEST.

'And they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days in the beginning of barley harvest.'—2 Sam. xxi. 9.

THERE is much in the chapter which has been read as the First Lesson for comment and meditation—much that may suggest thoughts good for us at this moment.

And, first of all, there is the dread lesson of God's repaying justice, His giving back to the house of a man who had done wickedly a late but sure recompense of punishment. 'And there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year: and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.'

And who were the Gibeonites? They were a people with whom Joshua (see Josh. ix.) had made a league or covenant that he would not kill them, but let them live. They had obtained that promise from Joshua by a trick, by pretending that they had come from a far country, attracted by

the fame of the Israelites and God's mighty workings on their behalf; while all the time they were dwellers in the land of Canaan—a remnant of the Amorites, doomed with the rest of the guilty race to fall before the sword of Israel.

But, though obtained by fraud, the promise was binding, and it was strictly kept by Joshua and his successors. The Gibeonites were allowed to remain unmolested; they were, indeed, treated as a conquered people, made hewers of wood and drawers of water to their masters; but their lives were spared, and the lives of their children after them. They continued a distinct people, servants indeed to the Israelites, living amongst them, but uninjured in person for the space of four hundred years, because of that solemn oath which Joshua and the princes had sworn unto them.

When Saul was king he set that oath aside. He sought to slay the Gibeonites; and we are told that he did it 'in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.' They dwelt within his tribe, and were entitled to his protection; they were defenceless men, resting entirely on the oath of the covenant. It was, then, a great crime, a great act of injustice, on the part of Saul to slay the Gibeonites.

At first no notice seemed to be taken by God of this breach of covenant. A quarter of a century went by, and no sign was given that the Lord

cared for it. But at length, far on in David's reign, the sign appeared: 'There was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year, and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.'

David, on this, sent for the Gibeonites—the remnant that was left, that had escaped the sword of Saul—and said to them, 'What shall I do for you, and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord?' They replied that they would accept neither silver nor gold of Saul's house by way of satisfaction; but they demanded that seven sons of the man who had injured them should be delivered unto them, that they might hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul.

David had no alternative but to comply. 'He took the two sons of Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal, the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai, the Meholathite: and he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites; and they hanged them in the hill before the Lord: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.'

So did punishment overtake the guilty house

of Saul. Seven of his family, two sons and five grandsons, were cut off by an ignominious and premature death, because of Saul's sin. Surely, my brethren, such a history carries with it its own solemn lesson — surely it is a witness how God regards injustice, what a sacred thing an oath is in His sight, how surely He will visit those who set it at naught. Yes, and it is a witness that punishment does not always immediately follow upon the offence, that it is often delayed, that there is often a long space between the committing of sin and the exacting satisfaction for the same — a space of mercy and forbearance — that the sinner may come to himself, and sorrow earnestly unto repentance.

That is plainly one great lesson to be learnt from the sad history of Saul's sons put to death for their father's transgression — because he slew the Gibeonites. We must not forget it in our natural sympathy with the sufferers.

For sympathise, I think, we needs must with these seven men. There is something very touching in the account of their death: 'They fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.' This mention of the season — 'the days of harvest, the first days' — is calculated to heighten our regret. For harvest-days, early days of harvest, such as we are having now, are among the most

precious and beautiful of the year; it is a time of unusual activity, of busy labour — a time, too, of joy and gladness, as once again we receive, preserved to us by God's goodness, the kindly fruits of the year. We feel the greater pity for men dying at such a time—dying as these men did, in their full strength, before age and infirmity had overtaken them; we feel pity for them, just as we feel pity for those amongst ourselves who die in summer. The contrast is so great at that time between life and death — between the joy and stir and bright sunshine of the outward world, and the stillness and solitariness and gloom of the grave!

I say, then, it is but natural that we should feel for Saul's sons 'put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.'

But we must not, for that, call in question the righteousness of their punishment; we must not find fault with God's appointment; we must not charge Him—the Merciful, the Long-suffering—with cruelty. When we read these things, we should consider the lesson intended in them, and apply the same for our warning. That lesson is that God is the punisher of sin—that, though He may delay the stroke, He does not forget—that the evil done in one generation often recoils upon another, according to that awful law which declares

that God visiteth the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those who set at naught His holy commandments.

And now look at a further lesson which there is for us in this chapter—look at her whose name is inseparably connected with the death of Saul's sons: 'They fell all seven together in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest. And Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth and spread it for her on the rock from the beginning of harvest, until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night.'

'Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah'—the mother of two of those unfortunate seven—how surely shall her name and that kind act of hers be had in undying remembrance! What a labour of pain and labour of love was this of hers!

For think what it was that she did. The bodies of her sons and their kinsmen were hung up, gibbeted on the hill of Gibeah, to atone for the sin of their father. For it is written, 'Cursed is every one that hangeth upon a tree.' They were to hang there till the drought—the drought which was the sign of God's displeasure—ceased. It was early in the summer, in the 'days of harvest, the first days, the beginning of barley harvest;' and at that

time, even in ordinary seasons, no rain could be expected, not till the autumn had set in. And now Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, who dared not meddle with the bodies, takes up her position as a watcher on the bare rock below them. 'She took sackcloth, the token of mourning, and spread it for her upon the rock.' And there, with that sad sight before her, she remained, never stirring night nor day, exposed by day to the blazing sun of that hot Syrian sky, and by night to the frosts and dew, keeping her ceaseless guard lest those poor lifeless forms should fall a prey to the only spoiler that yet could harm them, the carrion birds and ravening wolves. She 'suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.' And for how long? This is not told us; but it might have been for weeks, even months, till the curse was removed, till the welcome, wished-for showers, the token of the accepted atonement, came, 'until water dropped upon them out of heaven.'

After that there was no impediment to their burial. But before I speak of that, and of the person by whom it was performed, let me recognise, and ask you to recognise, our obligation to Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. She is a pattern for all time of respect and piety towards the dead. The horror that we feel on seeing human remains exposed to insult, the care that we take of our

churchyards, the interest that we feel for the soldier's grave, the pains we take to keep sacred the spot where our brave men lie who have died in battle,—who can say how much of this is traceable to Rizpah?—to what she did on the hill by Gibeah of Saul?—to the influence of her story reaching on from age to age in the wide-spread record of the Bible?

Yes; we owe a debt, perhaps more than we think, to Rizpah. She has gone before us leaving us an example of reverence for the dead human body.

Such reverence, I need hardly say it, is the more due from us who are Christians. Rizpah knew not of our hope, and was no sharer in our belief. It greatly adds to our obligation to screen the dead from harm, that we have been taught from our earliest years to repeat the solemn words —'I believe in the resurrection of the body.' In the great hope that we shall rise again—that in some way of God's doing our bodies shall rise again—we find an additional argument for taking care of our dead.

For if these dry bones are to live—to live in any sort, and under any modification—surely they are not to be treated as other bones—not to lie neglected and exposed to view, but to be tenderly and reverently gathered up and hidden—laid up in the grave as in a treasure-house against the day

when He who is the Saviour, ay, the Saviour of the body, shall return, and send out His voice, His glorious voice, and all who are in the graves shall hear that voice, and come forth, and stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army!

One more thing I would notice, in concluding, and that is, the effect of this act of Rizpah upon David. It was told him what she had done, and he saw in it a lesson for his own conduct. The bones of Saul and of Jonathan — Jonathan, his bosom friend — were still lying dishonoured and unburied in Jabez-gilead. David now sends for and collects them, and also the bones of them that were hanged, and buries them all together in the family sepulchre at Zelah, in the country of Benjamin, to which tribe Saul belonged.

So true is it that one good deed leads to another!—that most of what is best and noblest in our conduct comes from copying the good example of others!

Blessed, indeed, are they who first set the good example—who go before their brethren in doing the things which God approves! Blessed in their silent graves who leave behind them a leaven of righteousness in the earth!—footsteps on the narrow way—some word or work worthy of imitation —something by which those who come after may be made better, stirred up and quickened, provoked unto love and good works!

Blessed are they! Ay, though they be taken from the midst of their work—cut off in the days of harvest, in the first days, with much of the field yet unreaped!

We, perhaps, when such things happen, are apt to grieve with an excessive grief. We think how much our friend might have done for God, had his dear life been spared; we miss his helpful hand, his cheering voice in the Master's field!

It is natural so to grieve. But surely our sorrow should be, not on his account, but only on our own account. The servant of God is no loser by his interrupted labour—because his Master's call comes to him while it is yet full day. His half life is better than the whole life of another, less marred by mistakes and failings, more conformed in every way—yea, even in its short earthly duration—to the life of our Great Example!

And there is this other thought to comfort us—rest is sweeter than toil; and though it be a noble and honourable office to which Christ's Minister is called—'to teach and to premonish, to feed and to provide for the Lord's family,' to go before His face, and to prepare His way in the world—yet there is one thing yet more to be desired, yet more satisfying, and that is, 'to depart and to be with Christ'—Christ Whom he so truly loved and followed—Whose he was, and Whom he served, and with Whom he now abideth

in the House for ever—no more a servant, but a son!

'Thou shalt give him everlasting felicity, and make him glad with the joy of Thy countenance.'

NOTE.—This Sermon was preached July 31st, the Sunday after the funeral of the Rev. W. S. Thomason, the much-lamented Vicar of Burgh, Lincolnshire, who died suddenly in Scotland while resting from over-work, aged thirty-four! He was buried at Burgh July 30, 1870.

XIX.

WASTED GOODS.

'And He said unto His disciples, There was a certain rich man which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.'—St. Luke, xvi. 1.

THE parable of the unjust steward appointed for the Gospel of this Sunday, rich as it is in matter for our instruction, has in it some things that at first seem hard to understand; and which are liable to be wrested to a wrong interpretation.

The chief difficulty of the parable is that our Lord should seem to hold up to us for an example a man whose conduct was that of the unjust steward. 'The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.'

And the thing for which he was commended or praised was an act of dishonesty! Finding himself in difficulties, in danger of losing his place for mismanagement of his master's property —because he had wasted his goods—what had this steward done? Why, he had invited his master's debtors—his tenants—to send in false re-

turns of what was due from them to their lord. 'How much owest thou unto my lord?' was his question to the man who farmed the olive-garden; and when the man replied,—'An hundred measures of oil'—he bade him take his bill and sit down quickly and write fifty. To another who rented the corn land, he said, 'And how much owest thou?' the tenant answered, 'An hundred measures of wheat;' and to him he said, 'Take thy bill, and write four-score!'

Nothing you will see could be more dishonest. The steward was a ruined man, and he sought to build up his broken fortune by making his lord's tenants accomplices with himself in further defrauding his master. And this is the man whom our Lord seems, at first sight, to praise, whom He proposes to us as an example. 'The lord commended the unjust steward!'

That is the chief difficulty in the parable. That the just, the holy, the truth-loving, truth-speaking Jesus should seem—even in a figure—to have a word of praise for a man so corrupt or utterly unprincipled as the unjust steward.

How are we to explain it? Why in this way—that the Lord does not praise the steward for his roguery, but for the clever forethought, the prudence and precaution which he showed.

The man was a ruined man, his stewardship was taken away from him, and he was reduced

to utter want; he could not dig, he had been used to a delicate easy life, and he could not now turn his hand to hard work; he was too proud to beg, so he hit upon a plan which should at once relieve his want and save his pride. He bound his lord's debtors to him by the wicked scheme we have seen. He secured a reception for himself in their houses, when he should be put out of the stewardship.

It was the ingenuity of the man—his clever adaptation of his available means to the end he had in view—his looking forward to a day of necessity, and providing against that day; it was for this that he is commended—it was in this, and not, we are sure, in his roguery, that he is proposed to us as an example.

So far of the chief difficulty of this parable. It ceases to be a difficulty when we keep in view the main drift of the parable, which is to teach Christians, Christ's own disciples, to be more active, more in earnest, more thoughtful and provident in what concerns their eternal interests than they usually are.

For this end—to provoke us to a holy jealousy, the Lord puts before us the superior wisdom shown by the unjust steward in a matter of mere temporal policy.

The dishonesty of the steward is not an essential part of the parable. The one point in which he is put before us as an example is in his

prudence, his taking throught, his wisdom. 'The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely, for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.'

Sad that it should be so! But so undoubtedly it is. 'The children of this world'—persons who live for this life only—who 'jump the life to come'—leave it altogether out of their consideration—who care only for the good things of this present time, for what they can get here of pleasure, or riches, or comfort, or honour,—are wiser, take more pains, show more zeal, use greater efforts to obtain their end, than do we, the professed disciples of Jesus Christ, 'the children of light,' in our search after the true riches, the heavenly inheritance, the kingdom of God!

It cannot, I fear, be disputed that such is the case. As compared with the worldly-wise man, the Christian is a long way behind. He does not show the earnestness, the energy, the foresight, the singleness of aim which the other does. With objects utterly trivial if set in the balance with ours, the worldly man pursues those objects—whether it be wealth, or station, or pleasure—with a zeal which we might well wish to make our own. He is *wiser*—humbling as the confession is—he is *wiser*, much wiser in his generation, than the children of light!

But is this always to be so? Must we be con-

tent to sit down and sadly acknowledge that the case is against us, that the reproach is true, that we cannot help it, nor alter it?

Oh, surely not! that were a most unworthy part to take. Christ, by commending the wisdom of the unjust steward, seeks, I have said, to provoke us to rivalry. He shows us a picture which, while it rebukes our past slackness, our coldness, our indifference, our lack of zeal, should also stimulate us to greater diligence for the time to come. He bids us not only admire the forethought, the skill, the wisdom of the unjust steward; the preparing for himself a refuge against the storm—but to go ourselves and do likewise.

Let us lay it to heart. Let us, when reading this parable, put out of sight, as far as may be, the injustice of the steward, and keep prominent before us his wisdom, his foresight, his taking care for his after-condition; and let us imitate him in these. Let us bring to bear upon our pursuit of heavenly things, upon our efforts after godliness, our endeavour to put on the Christian character, to become as Christ would have us become, pure, and peaceable, and just, and true, the zeal and the prudence which he brought to bear upon his pursuit of worldly things. Let us seek as diligently as he sought a refuge against the day of need, a shelter for our head when the earthly house of our present dwelling shall be broken up—a build-

ing of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!

And this brings me to a further lesson provided for in this Parable—provided for us in the words with which our Lord sums up His teaching: 'Make to yourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness: that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.'

The meaning of this seems to be, that we are so to use our worldly fortunes, so to employ the goods intrusted to us here, that when we fail, *i. e.* when we die, the friends we have made by a use of these goods may help to our entrance into the kingdom of our God and our Saviour.

That, I think, is what the words mean. And they are words which every one of us—and they most especially who have large worldly goods—will do well to keep in mind.

Much is said in the Bible about the danger of wealth, of the snare which riches are to their possessors, of their deadening effect upon the soul, so much, that some pious persons have felt that the condition of a rich man is of all conditions the least to be desired; that it is a condition that almost precludes a man from seeing God.

But here is a passage which puts that condition in a better light. We are told—and told by our Lord—that wealth and worldly goods need not necessarily shut a man out of heaven—need not

be injurious to him, nor stand in the way of his salvation; that they are the materials out of which he may make himself friends — friends of the greatest value — friends that shall serve him in the utmost need — friends in the hour of death, when he is put out of his house, when he goes bare as he came, out of this world into the next—friends who will receive him into the everlasting habitations!

And who are these friends which a rich man may make to himself out of his riches? They are clearly indicated by our Lord in His description of the day of judgment: 'I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in; naked, and ye clothed Me; I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me.'

The hungry, to whom we have given bread; *the naked*, to whom we have given clothes; *the sick* and *afflicted*, whom we have visited and comforted in their affliction; the *stranger*, the foreigner, the alien from the covenant of promise, to whom we have gone as ambassadors for Jesus Christ, and whose feet stumbling in heathen darkness and error, we have guided into the way of peace— these are the *friends* that a man may make, who, rich in this world's goods, shows himself ever ready to give and glad to distribute, and who never turns

his face away from the call and claims of his fellow-creature's necessities.

They are friends whose friendship will be brought into play hereafter. They cannot recompense us now; but, if there be truth in the Gospel, they will greatly bestead us in the last day. The service done to these our poor and suffering brethren, the kindness shown to them, will be set down in the record, and counted as done to our Lord Himself: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

Lastly, let us return back for a moment to the words that begin this parable, and which form my text: 'There was a certain rich man which had a steward, and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.'

The dislike to waste is seen in other words and works of our Lord. It is seen in His remark after feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes: 'Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.' It is seen in His word to the labourers waiting in the market-place: 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?'—wasting time. Most of all it is seen in His own life. Never did Jesus Christ waste a single hour of that short day in which it was given Him to work the works of God. It is wonderful to reflect what He did, and in how short a time! for He was but thirty-three when they

crucified Him. And yet in these few years He accomplished all that He undertook. He redeemed man; He wrought out a great deliverance for the world.

Think often of it, brethren. Think how Jesus Christ, by His words, and by His example, protests against waste—waste of every kind—waste of power, waste of talents, waste of health, waste of man's working day, waste of human life! Think how you and I, and all mankind, must stand before One who has so great a dislike to waste, and who is so good a Judge of the value of time.

And if your conscience prick you onthis score; if it convict you of standing idle, of the mismanagement of precious time and precious, God-given faculties; if you feel that you have wasted your Master's goods, oh, be persuaded to make haste and redeem the past, by a more careful dealing with those goods in future.

Use your several gifts—your health, your strong limbs, your mind, with its various faculties; your outward advantages—if such you have—of fortune, or rank, or position; all your powers and all your opportunities; your time, your money, your means of grace—as a trust from God; as a trust to be accounted for, for which He will one day reckon with you. Use this trust—this *stewardship*—so conscientiously, so diligently, that you may have something to show in the day of audit; that your

Heavenly Master, when He comes, may receive of His own with usury; may find cause for saying, when He sums up your life's account, 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

XX.

THE RECHABITES, OR TEMPERANCE.

'And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab, the son of Rechab our father, commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever.'—Jer. xxxv. 5, 6.

THE obedience of the Rechabites is the subject of the first lesson for this Sunday (15th Trinity). By it God condemns the disobedience of the Jews. For it,—because of their obedience to the commandment of their father Jonadab,—God pronounces a blessing upon his posterity to the latest generation. 'Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever!'

Now let us us look a little closer at the history of these remarkable people, the Rechabites, the first total abstainers from wine and strong drink. They were the descendants of an Arab chief called Jonadab, one of the Kenites, a people of Æthiopia, and connected with Moses through his father-in-law Jethro. During the reign of Jehu we

first hear of Jonadab, as a man of piety and influence, so much so, that the king took him up in his chariot to ride with him to Samaria that he might be a witness of Jehu's zeal for the Lord. Now this Jonadab had laid a singular and solemn charge upon his tribe: neither to drink wine, nor to live in cities, nor to build houses, neither to sow, nor plant vineyard nor have any; but to dwell always in tents, moving about from place to place, with no fixed, settled habitation.

The reason why Jonadab laid such a command upon his people, was that he might guard them from the luxury and corrupt habits that he feared would else be contracted from their living among the Israelites. He wished to keep them as their fathers were, simple children of the desert. Hence his stern command, 'Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever. Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents, that ye may live many days in the land where ye are strangers.'

Well, that commandment was kept strictly and to the letter. Two hundred years after the death of Jonadab, these Kenites, who in honour of their great chief were now called Rechabites, continued to observe the customs of their ancestors. In the days of Jehoiakim, as we have read, a great experiment was made on these men. Jere-

miah, the prophet, by God's ordering, brought the Rechabites, who had been driven by an invasion of the land within the walls of Jerusalem, and were now residing there, dwelling as usual in tents, into the house of the Lord, and set before them pots full of wine, and cups, and said unto them, Drink ye wine! It was a prophet,—an acknowledged prophet of God who tempted them,—the times were greatly changed: they were in distress and straitness, but not the less did they hold fast by their father's commandment. 'We will drink no wine: for Jonadab, the son of Rechab our father, commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever.'

So did these simple men obey the voice of their distant ancestor. And that obedience was made by the prophet a ground for condemning his own countrymen for their disobedience. 'The words of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early, and speaking, but ye hearkened not unto me. I have also sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have

given to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me.'

Moreover, God by the same prophet pronounces a blessing upon the obedient Rechabites. 'Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.' In other words, God promised that through all generations, to the very end of time, the stock of Jonadab, the seed of that good man, should be preserved. There should not fail to be a man to stand before God as the representative of Jonadab for ever!

And before noticing the main lesson that there is for us here, let me say a word about the fulfilment of the promise to the house of the Rechabites. They were Arabs, wandering tribes of the desert, without fixed home, house, or territory. Consequently we have no accurate knowledge of them. But the simple ways of Jonadab are still the ways of the whole people. And no doubt there are among them at the present moment the direct descendants of the house of the Rechabites,—still living according to the precepts of Jonadab, drinking no wine nor strong drink, neither ploughing, nor sowing, nor cultivating vineyards,—but roam-

ing from spot to spot, dwelling as their fathers did in tents, and worshipping as their fathers did the Lord God.

A writer of the twelfth century, a Jew, mentions that in his travels he found a place where Jews dwelt who were called Rechabites. And quite a modern traveller relates that in one of his numerous journeys in search of the remains of the ten tribes, he fell in with a people in Arabia who called themselves the sons of Rechab: and who still kept the customs commanded their forefathers by Jonadab.

So that, as I said, there seems no reason to doubt but that the promise of God has been hitherto fulfilled. His blessing on obedience has lighted on that Arab family from generation to generation, and will be with them, we are sure, till the end.

And now what are the lessons for ourselves from this? Firstly, I think we should notice how well pleasing in the sight of God is obedience to parents.

It was for their respect to the words of Jonadab, the son of Rechab their father, that they were commended, 'Ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father.' It was this which drew down upon them God's blessing. And this is quite in keeping with that great fifth commandment, which stands at the head of the Second Table, and which is the foundation of all our neighbourly

duties. 'Honour' thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.'

Yes. By the laws of our Maker there is no part of our human duty to the doing of which so sure a blessing is attached, as to the obeying our parents. Let the young who hear me lay it to heart. You will soon be old enough to prove it by your own experience. But now, beforehand, let me show it you, while you have father and mother still living in the house with you; now learn that the sure way to secure God's blessing is to show piety at home; to take heed to the counsel and commandment of your parents; to love, honour, and, where you are able, to succour your father and mother.

That is the first thing for us to learn from what is recorded of the house of the Rechabites. And a second lesson may be gathered from recollecting the particular injunction laid upon them by their father.

When tempted to a very natural indulgence,—to drink a cup of wine,—they had the firmness to say 'No,' 'because Jonadab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine.' 'Ye shall drink no wine,'—of course 'wine' is only used for any intoxicating drink. This, then, was a precept of temperance. A call to live that sober, that self-controlled life which is required of all God's

people. When men cannot live such a life without total abstinence, why then for them this is God's law, 'Drink no wine.' For them,—but not for others,—for all God's creatures are good, and nothing to be refused if it be taken with moderation, where the use of it is bounded by temperance.

But if a man cannot keep within that bound; if he finds that taking a little leads him on to take too much, why then for him this precept comes into force and is binding upon him, 'Drink no wine, nor any strong drink.'

What thou hast to do as a Christian is, before all things, to live soberly,—to keep thy body in soberness, temperance, and chastity. If drink, to alter slightly the words of St. Paul in 1 Cor. viii.—if drink makes thee to offend, then must thou resolve to drink no strong drink while the world lasteth, lest it make thee to offend!

But this precept, 'Drink no wine,' goes much further. I said it was a precept of temperance,—and temperance has to deal with other things besides strong drink. The Christian is a man who strives to be temperate in all things,—temperate in meat,—temperate in drink,—temperate in the use of speech,—temperate in his judgment of others,—temperate in his anger,—temperate in his pleasures,—temperate in his pursuit of worldly goods.

He is placed in the midst of a world where temperance, moderation, self-restraint, is required to save him from a fall at every step; where if he be intemperate, without self-control, he is sure to come to harm. No wonder then that we meet with such repeated injunctions on this head in the Scriptures. 'Abstain,' writes St. Peter; 'abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.' And thrice over in his First Epistle he repeats his charge, 'Be sober.' St. Paul too, you will remember, besides exhorting his converts to self-control,—to mortify their members upon earth,—in one passage (1 Cor. ix. 27) uses these remarkable words about himself, 'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway!' You see, brethren, that he contemplates the possibility of his own soul being lost unless he was perfect master of his bodily appetites and passions,—unless he was temperate in all things.

But who, it may be asked, is sufficient for this? Who can live the Christian life of temperance and self-control which is required of us? I grant that, of ourselves, and unaided by divine grace, we shall none of us be able so to live. But grace is given to all who seek it. And further, we have a most powerful motive to lead such a life in the very fact that we are Christians.

For what are Christians? Followers of One who was crucified; done to a most cruel death in order that He might atone for our sins, and bring us back to God. 'God forbid,' says the apostle, in the epistle for this Sunday,—'God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.'

There is the motive, there is the power to lead a Christian life, a thorough realizing to ourselves of the sufferings of our Saviour on the cross. Jesus died for me! He was wounded for my transgressions; He was bruised for my iniquities; He bore in His holy body my sins, and the sins of my brother men upon the tree! And can I count it a hard thing if at His call I take up the cross and follow Him? Must I not feel that He has redeemed me, and others like me, at such a cost, that henceforth we should not live unto ourselves but unto Him who died for us?

Indeed, I know no stronger argument to persuade to a life of temperance, than that which I have drawn from a sight of Jesus Christ upon His cross. Look at Him daily lifted up there on your behalf. Keep before you the great fact, that for you, for me, for all mankind, He, the holy One, the innocent, was Crucified. And do not fail to draw this inference from it: I cannot be a true follower of a Crucified Master, so long as I allow

one single bosom sin to reign uncorrected and unsubdued within me. They that are really Christ's must in His strength wrestle with every rising up of their carnal and corrupt nature—they must crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts!

XXI.

WALKING IN THE FIRE.

'Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.'—Dan. iii. 25.

VERY beautiful and very instructive are the first lessons appointed for this nineteenth Sunday after Trinity. They are taken from the book of the prophet Daniel, about whom I would first say a few words.

Daniel was of the tribe of Judah; of illustrious, if not of kingly descent; and was carried away captive to Babylon in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, when he was about twenty years of age. There is much in the story of his captivity to remind us of Joseph. Like Joseph, he rose from a captive's condition to a place of great honour and dignity in a foreign land. Like Joseph, he lived blameless amid the corruption of a great heathen court. Like Joseph, he experienced throughout his life many signal proofs of God's favour and protec-

tion; and, like Joseph, his life was prolonged in honour and respect to a good old age.

So far of the author of that book of the Old Testament, whence the first lessons are taken on this Sunday,—the prophet Daniel. Let us now consider the teaching of the morning lesson,—what we should learn from the account of the three Israelites who were cast into the burning fiery furnace, and of their deliverance out of it.

'Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits; and he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.' This image his subjects were commanded to worship. The herald of the king cried and said to the assembled multitude, 'To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: and whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.'

The crowd, obedient to the word, bowed before the huge image. But three Israelites,—those three whom the king, at the request of Daniel, had set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—would not bow down and worship. They were imme-

diately brought before the king, and told that the dreadful threat would be carried out if they did not instantly comply with the king's decree. Very noble was their answer, very valuable as an example of true moral courage, 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said unto the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.'

Try to realize the scene. The great despot and his guards ready at his beck to execute his cruel will; the defenceless Israelites—men out of a conquered land; men who had made themselves enemies in the land of their captivity by their uprightness. Think what courage, what faith, what reliance on an unseen arm there must have been in these men so defenceless, so friendless, to act as they acted, and to speak as they spoke at such a crisis!

It was not bravado on their part. It was not a mere fanatic contempt of life which moved them. It was simple faith,—a conviction that God was above all, and God was to be feared, and not man. It was the seeing Him who is invisible, and reverencing His word,—His great second

commandment, 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.' It was this which made these defenceless men so strong, so bold, so fearless of the worst that the king could do to them! 'If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. But if not,'—ay! though we may die for it, yet in Him will we trust, Him will we serve, and none else,—'but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.'

This noble answer, this brave bearing, had no effect upon the angry king. He bade heat the furnace 'one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind the three Israelites, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.'

They were seized and bound just as they were in their loose flowing Eastern dress, and hurled into the furnace. And so great was the force of the fire, owing to the additional heating, that the executioners, the strong men who fulfilled the king's orders, were caught themselves by the flames and perished.

And now, behold! a mighty wonder! The three men fell down bound into the midst of the

fiery furnace. But instead of disappearing at once, shrivelled up like a scroll in that intense flame, the fire does not so much as consume their clothes! They who were cast in bound are observed to walk free and unhurt—loose, in the midst of the fire! And, lo! One with them who had not been cast in, different in look and form, more noble, more Godlike, walking with them and protecting them by His presence; 'and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.'

Yes, that was the secret of their safety. The God in whom they trusted did deliver them! They were safe and unhurt even in the midst of the fiery furnace, because they abode under the shadow of the Almighty! They were safe because He was with them according to His true promise,—'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee: and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.' Isa. xliii. 3.

How truly, and to the letter, this promise was kept, we may judge by what follows. Nebuchadnezzar observing the miracle, was astonished, and he rose up in haste, and came near, and called to the three Israelites, 'Ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither.' They did so, and walked forth from the furnace, before the wondering crowd. 'And the princes, governors,

and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.' Such a marvellous preservation reminds us of one of our Lord's comforting words to His faithful followers, 'Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not a hair of your head perish.'

And now let us gather from this history some lessons for our own support and guidance. The chief lesson has already been indicated: and it is this,—that God never deserts His people; that in their extremest necessity, He is their succour and defence, and, arising from this, confidence in the exhortation which says, 'Trust in the Lord for ever, for with the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.'

But more. That fiery furnace with the three men walking in it unhurt, sets forth, and was intended to set forth, this truth,—that God's people are kept, under temptation from falling and perishing by the power of faith.

Temptation is continually likened in Holy Scripture to fire. 'Beloved, think it not strange,' writes the Apostle, 'concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.' Temptation wraps a man round like flames. Temptation has the devouring

property of a heated furnace. Under it weak and unstable hearts melt and give way. You could not find a fitter emblem than that of a furnace heated one seven times more than is wont, to set forth some of the fiercest trials by which the soul of man is tried. And, alas! with only too many that trial is overwhelming. We come out of it, most of us do, more or less damaged: some of us wholly and for ever spoiled.

But a few there are who come out of it purified and strengthened. And these the Scripture calls blessed. 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.' A few there are who, like the three Israelites, walk unhurt in the fiercest fire of temptation; come out of it as they did, with body, soul, and spirit, unscathed, suffering no loss, more than conquerors through His mercy that has kept them.

For, brethren, we must not overlook this, which is the very centre lesson of this history. No man, not the best of men, is sufficient of himself to stand upright under temptation. He can only stand by the help of his Lord.

It was the presence of a fourth Person walking with them in the midst of the furnace, that kept off the devouring flame from the bodies and garments of the three Israelites. And so it ever is; that man is safe, and that man alone, who has God with him when he is tried; who carries with

him into temptation an ever present faith in a living God.

Men so often fall because they have no such faith, because they lean on their own strength, and try to walk independent of God.

We shall have read of the marvellous preservation of the three Israelites to little purpose if we do not take from it at least this conviction, that the only security against a grievous fall is an abiding sense of God's nearness to us, God's power to help us, God's readiness to help us if we call upon Him for His aid.

Yes, and we shall have read this narrative to little purpose if we do not see how it glorifies our Saviour! 'The form of the fourth was like the Son of God.' The Son of God—that is, Jesus Christ our Lord. He was not yet come in the flesh. But He existed, we believe, from everlasting. And it was His presence which saved those faithful Israelites.

And who but He is a saving presence still? What know we of God except as He is revealed to us in His Son? Whom have we in heaven,—whom here on earth, so sure a refuge in all our need as the Lord Jesus Christ? To whom but Him shall we go to defend us from our enemies, to guide us in difficulties, to fortify us against temptation, to pluck our foot out of the evil snare, to establish us in every good word and work?—to

Him who purposely is presented to us for these ends, 'Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?'

Then let what we have heard deepen our reverence and love for the Lord Jesus Christ. We walk in the midst of a dangerous and corrupt world. We have no strength of our own to stand with success against the many enemies that war against our soul. The fiery trial that tries us will be too much for us if we have to bear it alone. But One there is, never doubt it,—One whose strength is made perfect in human weakness. One there is to whose care and keeping if we commit our souls we shall be safe—even that Holy Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord!

He, from far distant time, has been a shelter and shield to His faithful, trusting people. Not at Babylon only, but in every place where need was, He has come to the rescue of His servants, been to them, to thousands and tens of thousands of them, an angel presence, walking with them in the midst of the fire, and screening them from its devouring force!

Let, then, this great Saviour be your refuge; go to Him for counsel, go to Him for support, go to Him for security and help in all the trials, troubles, dangers, and perplexities of your life. Feed on Jesus Christ in your hearts by faith. Walk as having Him before you for your example. Let

it be your morning and evening prayer that He would be with you!

Lord, say,—Lord, abide with us! Go not far from us, for trouble is hard at hand. Leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation! We have heard what Thou hast done for them of old! We have heard how Thy presence saved them in the midst of the fire! Be Thou to us what Thou was to them, 'A strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.' Isa. xxv. 4.

XXII.

WARS AND FIGHTINGS.

'From whence come wars and fightings among you?'—St. James, iv. 1.

THIS is a question we must often have wished to put, and never more so than in the last four months: 'From whence come wars and fightings?' Why is it that in this boasted nineteenth century the two greatest powers on the Continent of Europe have been all this time engaged in a deadly struggle? Why should nations so civilized, so proud of their civilization, yes, and both of them by profession Christian nations, have been putting forth all their strength to kill and destroy one another? 'From whence come wars?' Why is it that with Christ's blessed Gospel for our rule —the Gospel of peace and goodwill toward men— the Gospel which says, If a man smite thee on the one cheek, thou shalt turn to him the other also— the Gospel which bids us not render evil for evil, but overcome evil with good; which says to a

man, even when not the aggressor, when only on the defence, 'Put up thy sword into its sheath, for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword.' How comes it, I ask, that with all these barriers against war—these dissuasives from fighting—these prohibitions of strife, we have yet seen in these latter days such a deadly and destructive war as that still raging abroad? 'From whence come wars and fightings?'

The answer is, 'Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill,' or, as it were better translated, 'ye envy, and desire to have, and cannot obtain.' Yes, it is the lust of conquest, the desire to have what is not already ours—the envy of any power greater or more prosperous than ourselves—it is this which leads to war, which blinds men's reason and inflames their passions, and drives them on to act in this nineteenth century after the birth of Jesus Christ, as their savage forefathers acted in what we look upon as dark ages, while yet men were ignorant of the true God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

And then, to make matters worse, in these modern wars we must mix religion with our quarrels! We go to battle first calling upon God! Asking Him, the God of peace and love, to give us victory, to crown our efforts to kill and destroy with success!

There was an excuse for the heathen in so doing. They believed in a god of war,—a mighty power that took delight in blood and battles. They believed that by prayer and sacrifice they could make Mars, that god of war, their friend; and so they had some excuse for what they did. But what excuse can there be for us, a Christian nation, to approach God with prayer that we may have the victory over our foes? Must we not think that the whole thing, all the pomp and circumstance of war, is an abomination in His sight? Ought we not to pause before we dare to invite God, God our Saviour, to go out with our armies? Before we ask Him to be with us in the carnage and tumult of battle, who would not, when on earth, let one devoted follower lift up his weapon to ward off the worst injury from His own innocent and defenceless head?

The more we think of it, the more must we feel convinced that war between Christian nations is simply a denial of their religion. It is a going back into a condition out of which Christ came to deliver us. It shows that we have not yet learned, or learned very imperfectly, the truth as it is in Jesus. It is helping not to hasten, but to retard the coming of His kingdom, that peaceable Kingdom of the Branch, in which nations the most opposite shall be reconciled, where 'the wolf shall dwell with the lamb: and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;'

when 'they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain.'

No doubt there are degrees of guilt in going to war. No doubt the challenger, the provoker of the fight, has the most blame. But can we altogether acquit either side of departing from the law of Christ? Can we approve the conqueror when he claims to have God's blessing on his side? When in those brief messages which nowadays flash far and wide the tidings of victory and defeat we read such boasts as these,—'Another great victory—20,000 of the enemy killed or wounded —30,000 prisoners. All glory to God!' Can we, I say, acquiesce in this? Can we as Christians justify such a use of God's most holy name? Can we believe that He has any pleasure at all in such doings? Or that war, and carnage, and reckless casting away of human lives, can be anything but odious in His sight?

Surely the less men obtrude God's name into their quarrels the better. And for us, who are not engaged in the strife, who stand outside and are lookers-on, what can we do but pray—as we have been invited by our Bishop to pray—'that God would make wars to cease throughout the world; that He would pour upon us, and upon all the nations the Spirit of Peace, and spread abroad more and more the Gospel of Peace, and finally bring us, as one great family of His redeemed people, into

one communion and fellowship, and make us sit down together in the city of Eternal Peace, the Heavenly Jerusalem, there to praise Him everlastingly through Jesus Christ our Lord!'

And now to turn to another side of our subject. 'From whence come wars and fightings?' I have asked the question with reference to whole nations, especially with reference to those great peoples now striving in war. Let me ask it now in reference to individuals: 'From whence come wars and fightings among you?'

Why is it that we hear of so many brawls, so much fighting and quarrelling close at home? For that we do hear, and hear a great deal more than is pleasant of such things, will not be denied. Cases of assault and battery are, alas! only too frequent in our courts of sessions. These, with cases of drunkenness, are brought before our magistrates week after week in constant succession, and, I grieve to say, in increased frequency.

But why is it? 'Whence come wars and fightings among you?' We are a Christian people. And to judge by the number of our churches and other places of religious resort, we are a religious people. We are fond of reckoning up our houses of worship, and the number of our enrolled members. We allow it—of whatever sect or side—we all allow it to be a part of our neighbourly duty 'to hurt nobody, by word or deed.' We read our

Bibles, both here and in our homes, wherein we are taught that anger, and clamour, violence, and wrath, and strife, are works of the flesh: things contrary to our Christian profession, and which grieve the Holy Spirit of God; that we ought rather to bear and to forbear, and by patience under injury seek to overcome evil with good.

We learn these blessed truths from our childhood upward. And no doubt we should be much worse than we are if we did not so learn them. Still how sad is it to see the little effect of such hearing, and reading, and learning of God's Holy Word upon our lives! How sad is it to read week by week in our county newspapers of the quarrels and strifes that are amongst us!

And to what are they to be ascribed? 'Whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain.'

Yes, it is the same with individuals as with nations. Wars and fightings come of our lusts; of the unruly passions that war in our members, that are not kept under and controlled, that carry us away to deeds for which we are afterwards sorry, and which bring us to disgrace and shame.

That is one cause of wars and fightings, the uncontrolled temper that rages in our bosoms. And why is it an uncontrolled temper? Why is it not

checked, and kept, as it were, with a bridle? Why does it lord it over us and carry us captive at its will?

I will tell you. Because we have not been timely corrected in our boyhood; because our parents have not enough restrained us while they had it in their power to restrain us, while we were young. And, further, because, as we grew up, and got to be our own masters, we have been at no pains to master our strong passions; we have not ourselves striven for the mastery, nor have we looked out of ourselves for help; we have never heartily and humbly bowed our knees in prayer before God for grace to have the victory over our unruly wills and affections; we have not taken to ourselves the armour of God, that we might be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; we have lived without God, prayerless, fearless, Sabbath-less, churchless, like him we read of in the Gospel whose boast it was that he neither feared God nor regarded man.

That is some explanation of the sad frequency of brawls and quarrels amongst us.

These 'wars and fightings' are the natural growth of undisciplined tempers. Tempers bad and violent by nature, are made ten-fold worse, ten-fold more violent by the absence of timely correction and self-restraint.

Add to this the neglect of religion, no prayers,

no watchfulness, no study of the Bible, no attendance on God's public worship, the Sabbath habitually broken and profaned.

Find me a man—such as I have described—violent by nature, and made more violent by yielding to the sway of passion; one withal who sets at nought all the softening and improving aids of religion, and as sure as cause and effect are linked together, so surely shall we trace in that man's career breach upon breach of God's holy law; one work of the flesh heaped upon another, sin added to sin, provocation to provocation, till the cup of guilt be full.

Again, I have spoken of a bad natural temper, aggravated by want of discipline and the neglect of religion, as being one cause of the 'wars and fightings' which are only too common amongst us. There is yet another and very notable cause, which many here will be quick to fix upon, and give as an answer to the question before us—'From whence come wars and fightings among you?' and that cause is drunkenness.

A very large proportion of assaults arise from this as their beginning. Drinking first, and then fighting. Many a man is civil and quiet, and means no harm, till he is filled with excess of drink. See him the day after, when he has slept off his debauch, still heavy and dull, and ill at ease with its effects, and he will tell you that he did not

know that he had been fighting, he has forgotten all about it,—it all came of that hateful drink.

True, my friend, if you had not been drunken you would not have transgressed by strife. But does that excuse you? Does it lessen your offence? Oh, no! it rather heightens and increases it. You, not by nature a violent man, but peaceable and quiet, go and make yourself like a wild animal, brutal and savage, by hard drinking. You let in one wicked spirit, the spirit of drunkenness, and that wicked spirit brings with it seven other spirits—wrath, and violence, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, and strife, and quarrelling. These seven would have stayed without if you had not by your own act opened the door for them into your heart. And you must, therefore, bear the guilt. You are chargeable before God with making yourself different to what He, your Creator, made you,—quarrelsome instead of peaceful, a brawler and a rioter instead of being a man of a meek and quiet spirit; and all for what? for the sake of gratifying your depraved appetite; for the poor unworthy pleasure of an extra measure of drink!

Esau sold his birthright for a morsel of meat. We Christians barter away a far more priceless blessing—our hope of a heavenly inheritance—for an object quite as poor, quite as unimportant! And, not to press the future loss, see what a loss the drunkard has already: loss of character, loss of

respectability, loss of health, loss of a happy home, wife and child ill-fed and ill-clad, all through the selfish indulgence of his ruling passion!

I tell you no tale of fancy. I speak of sad realities. In every village you may see my words verified. You may see homes darkened and life 'emptied of all joy' through the one great plague that is upon us—drunkenness!

God grant that some of you young men may escape the contagion. God grant that you who are to fill our places when we are gathered to the dead may take warning by what you see; and grow up free of our faults, and so fall not under our condemnation. With many of us the night is far spent. For you the day, the light of mature life, is at hand. Then see to this, and pray for this—that you may walk honestly, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

XXIII.

THE GLORIFIED BODY.

'Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.'—Philip. iii. 21.

ST. PAUL, in the passage where these words occur, calls upon the Philippians to walk in his steps, and 'to decline the ways of carnal Christians.' 'Brethren,' he writes, 'be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, who mind earthly things.' He would have them avoid such persons and their ways, and go instead in the path in which he, their father and instructor in Christ, had gone before them. 'For our conversation,' he adds, 'is in heaven,'—we live already while on earth as citizens of a heavenly city,—

'from whence,'—from which heavenly city,—'we look for the Saviour.' We live as men who wait for their Lord, we look for Christ to come and complete His work, the redemption of the human body, Who has already redeemed the human soul; 'We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.'

That was the belief of the apostle St. Paul, his fixed, firm belief, in which, after he became a Christian, he lived, and in which he died. He believed that Jesus Christ, Who had appeared to him by the way, Whom he worshipped as his Lord, would come to be his Judge; and that when He came He would work a wonderful work upon His faithful followers, bestow on them a mighty gift,—the gift of a glorified body, a body fashioned like His own, fitted and prepared for an everlasting life. He believed in a judgment to come, in Jesus Christ to be his Judge, in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

And this, brethren, is our belief, the cheering, sobering, elevating belief of all true Christians.

We believe, as did St. Paul, that the Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, with great power and majesty to be the Judge of quick and dead. We believe that at His coming all of man-

kind that have died shall be raised up out of their graves, and stand before Him in Judgment, that to some of them, to His tried and true followers, will then be given a mighty gift,—a glorified body,—a body fashioned like their Saviour's, fitted and prepared to live with Him in heaven, and to live for everlasting.

That is our belief which we affirm so often as we repeat the Christian creeds. We believe, as did St. Paul, in a judgment to come, in Jesus Christ as our Judge, in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Such being the case, let us, with this passage from St. Paul before us, which we have read in the Epistle for this Sunday (23 Trinity) dwell for a few minutes on a subject which is here presented to us,—a subject of infinite consequence to us all, and on which each fresh instance of mortality, each death amongst those whom we have known must of itself force upon our minds.

And, first, of the difficulty that some have to conceive how it is possible for the dead to be raised to life, after their bodies have mouldered to dust in the grave. 'Some men will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?'

The apostle uses a harsh word of the man who asks this question. 'Thou fool,' he says, 'that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die.'

He points to the process of outward nature, life arising out of death, as seen in the seed sown. And no doubt this is an emblem, and meant to be an emblem of our resurrection. But there is this difference,—that the seed sown has in it when it is sown an element of life; while the dead body wants that element. 'It,' the body, 'is sown in corruption.' Every particle of it must undergo decay; turn again to its dust. The analogy between the seed sown and the buried human body may help to hint at a resurrection, but it does not of itself establish it as a certain fact. We must have further proof to satisfy us. We, and I speak what will be the experience of many of you,—we who have watched the body weaken and die, die almost before death—we who have seen every power and faculty grow weaker and weaker, and at last utterly cease—we who have carried the worn-out frame and laid it in the silent grave, and who know that a few years hence, when the sod is broken, and some fresh grave is dug, nothing will be found of what we deposited in the sacred earth but a few mouldering bones—we want more than to be told that a seed of corn sown in the ground rises up with renewed life and force a few months later!

And more is told. That which perplexes us—how the dry bones may live, how that which is sown in corruption can be raised in incorruption—

that which is sown in weakness can be raised in power,—this great marvel is explained to us in the words we have now before us, 'We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His own glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.'

There is the answer to the inquiry, 'How are the dead raised up?' They are raised up by the power of Jesus Christ; to Him is given all that we usually ascribe to God—the energy and might which can conquer death, which can call things that are not into being, which raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them. 'For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself.' And not only 'life in Himself,' but power to bestow that life upon whom He will. 'For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will.' Ay! though they have died, though they have been buried, though they have been turned again their dust? For hear this other great Scripture, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.'

Yes! we have Christ's word for it that we shall live though we die. He 'by His death hath destroyed death, and by His rising to life again hath restored to us everlasting life.'

Yes, we shall live, we shall not die eternally! And that we may live, be fitted and adapted to a future state of being different in its conditions from the life that now is, we shall be changed. We shall not be hereafter in God's blessed kingdom what we are at present. The life there will be a life painless, sinless, with no admixture of good and evil, but wholly and altogether good.

You will see at once, brethren, that for such a life we must be greatly altered from what we are at present. And this also, we are assured, will be the case. That body which at its best is a body of sin, plagued and tormented by unruly passions and affections, which at its worst is beneath the very brutes in the lawlessness of its indulgence, will not be the tenement of the soul in another state of being. 'He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.'

So far of the difficulty that besets us in realizing the great truth of the resurrection of the body. That difficulty vanishes before this text. We shall not be in heaven, supposing that we ever reach it, what we are on earth. And what follows from

this? Why, that we must not mix up our thoughts of earth, and its delights, and pursuits, with the thought of the life to come. They that shall attain that life 'neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.' (St. Luke, xx. 35, 36.)

This Scripture, as well as the text, gives us a very ennobling and elevating notion of the life to be hereafter.

The redeemed of the Lord, when they come to Zion, will come with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will be new creatures. They will take with them into that holy place nothing of earth, or earth's weakness, or earth's defilement. They will have glorified bodies as well as glorified spirits. The heavy vesture of decay which now, in this life, presses down the mind, will be exchanged for the wedding garment of the saints in light. The earthly tabernacle will give way, and be removed: and in its stead for a sure dwelling the soul will receive from its Saviour a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! We shall not be disembodied spirits—shadowy, unsubstantial phantoms. That is not the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. Body, soul, and spirit, will be combined, as they are here, to make up the separate man. But the body will not be, as now,

a clog upon the soul, but its fit adornment and covering. 'He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.'

And next, brethren, look at the consolation which this doctrine brings to us when our hearts are sad with sorrow for those whom we have lost.

In cases of lingering illness the body waxes weaker and more weak, the limbs lose their roundness and fulness, and the poor sufferer becomes, as we say, a mere living skeleton! Aye, and sometimes, what is yet more distressing to witness, the mind fails with the body, and the last days of an honoured, active life are passed in the helplessness and querulousness of a second infancy.

In such cases, and they are not uncommon, what comfort is it for a Christian to turn to the Word of God, which cannot lie nor deceive! How may it help us to bear up under the sorrowful spectacle, to remember that in the resurrection, when the Lord makes all things new, the former things will have quite passed away. That what we tended and nursed, and carried to the grave in weakness, will be raised in power. That, when we meet again,—and we do hope to meet again—we, and they shall have experienced a great change; even the change spoken of in the text,—to be wrought in us in that day when the Lord Jesus

Christ, the Saviour, the Redeemer, shall come once more, and shall make good the word of His servant and apostle, 'and change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.'

Lastly, the subject before us has its side of warning. 'We look for the Saviour,' we look for Him to raise us up out of our graves, to give us glorified bodies, fitted for the heavenly inheritance.

But with such expectations how ought we to live at present? Seeing we look for such things what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

The glorified body can only be for the faithful and tried servant, for the friend and follower, not for the enemy and opposer of the Lord Jesus Christ. The change, the mighty change, to be effected in us refers only to the former. There can be no change for the better in the lot of the ungodly hereafter. Their 'vile body' in which they die, will be a 'vile body' when they are raised up again. He that is unjust now will be unjust then. He that is impure now will be impure then. He that is filthy, defiled by unrepented of sin now, will be filthy and defiled still. Again, then, I say it, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and god-

liness? How should we study to present our bodies, while yet on earth, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. How should we shun all evil, and follow all good, and yield our members as instruments of righteousness unto God,—that so when we die, and are turned again to our dust, we may leave a good hope to those who mourn for us; a hope, a trust, that we are not utterly perished; that the God and Saviour whom we loved and served, and sought to follow, will not forget us in the day of His return, that when He maketh all things new,—'a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,' He will be mindful of us, and 'will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.'

XXIV.

THE CURE OF THE BLOODY ISSUE.

'For she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment I shall be whole!'—St. Matt. ix. 21.

TWO miracles of our Lord's are recorded in the Gospel of this Sunday—the curing of the bloody issue, and the raising from death of Jairus' daughter. It is to the former of these that I wish now to call your attention. The two miracles are interlaced in the Gospel narrative.

'While Jesus spake to John's disciples, behold there came a certain ruler and worshipped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead, but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live! And Jesus,' touched by the father's pathetic appeal, 'arose and followed him: and so did His disciples. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased of an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment: for she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole.'

We shall have to supply from the two other

Evangelists, St. Mark and St. Luke, some most instructive particulars in the sequel of this story. But first consider, from what we have heard, the condition of this poor woman. She had laboured twelve long years under a disease which seemed to admit of no remedy. It was not that she had not sought a remedy; 'She had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could she be healed of any.' St. Mark adds, 'She was nothing bettered by their treatment, but rather grew worse.' At length it came into her mind to apply to our Lord. His fame had reached her in her misery. She had been told of the cures He did so freely, 'without money and without price,' on persons afflicted with every sort of sickness and disease. And she determined to seek His aid for her own case. But she was a timid woman, broken down with long illness, and she shrunk from openly asking Him to help her. So 'she came behind Him in the press, and touched the hem of His garment: for she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole.'

Nor was she disappointed. At that timid but believing touch there went out virtue from the Great Physician that wrought her cure. 'Straightway'—on the instant, not by gradual process of improvement, but altogether and at once—'the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.'

'Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him, turned Him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?' He asked this, not surely in ignorance—not because He needed the information, but for her sake who had touched Him, and in order to her more complete establishment in faith.

'When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng Thee, press Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?' The Lord, on this, only repeated His assertion, —'Somebody hath touched Me, for I'—and the 'I' is emphatic—'I perceive'—whatever you may think—'I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me.' At the same time, 'He looked round about to see her that had done the thing.'

Then, 'the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him all the truth,' told Him, before all the people, 'for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately.'

This public acknowledgment of her cure, this open testimony to the power of Christ to heal, was, we may think, the object of our Lord's question, and that attained, He hastens to calm the fears of this poor woman. 'He said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace.' And He added, that

her joy might be full, the assurance that the cure should be complete, that the old disease should not break out again, 'Be'—or, as we might expand the word—'continue whole of thy plague.'

And now to gather some lessons for ourselves from this miracle: the two points chiefly to be noticed, are, first, the power of faith, the part it plays in working health; and, secondly, the duty of publicly acknowledging Jesus Christ.

And, first, of the power of faith: 'Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole.' Those, remember, are Christ's own words. He ascribes this woman's cure expressly to her faith.

And so we find Him saying on many like occasions, ascribing a mighty healing power to faith. Witness what He said to the centurion who besought Him for his servant's life: 'Go thy way, and as thou hast believed so be it done unto thee!' Witness His words to the two blind men who followed Him, crying, 'Thou Son of David, have mercy on us;' 'Believe ye that I am able to do this?' And on their answering, 'Yea, Lord,' remember how 'He touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.' Witness, again, what He said to the woman that was a sinner, in Simon's house, 'Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace.' Witness these and many like words, all to the same purpose; all testifying to the power of faith. Faith gives sight to the blind;

faith restores the leper; faith causes the lame to walk; faith unties the string of the dumb tongue; faith, exercised by others on behalf of a sick friend, has power to bring health even in the last stage of mortal illness.

And yet when I say this, I would not have you think that in any of these cases faith itself is the cure; but only that it is instrumental towards obtaining it. The cure is wrought by the power of Jesus Christ — virtue that is in Him. That power, that virtue, faith lays hold on and makes its own, to the healing and saving both of soul and body.

We see it clearly to be so in the miracle before us. It was the power—the healing power—of Jesus Christ, going forth from Him, that dried up the fountain of that poor sufferer's blood. But that power had never gone forth except faith on her part had drawn it out.

Let us see in this an exact pattern of the method of man's redemption. We are saved by grace through faith. Salvation is there in Jesus Christ, full, complete, all-sufficient. But in order to obtain it there must be on our side the exercise of faith. We must put forth the hand that we may touch Christ. There must be in our hearts a fervent belief that He is our Saviour, an entire trust in His all-prevailing merits. The woman said, 'If I may but touch His garment I shall be whole.' A

Christian may say, 'If I have but faith, if I can but believe in from my heart, and confess with my mouth, the Lord Jesus, I shall be saved!'

The difficulty lies in doing what seems so easy.

Had it been a great thing — had we been told that in order to our pardon and salvation we must go through severe acts of penance and bodily mortification, or pay some costly price, 'come before the Lord with offerings,' should we not have done it? But now, when the terms are simply these,— 'Believe only, and thou shalt be made whole,'— what you could not do He has done for you — purged your guilt, atoned for your transgressions, you have but to profit by His work, to lay hold on the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; to approach the Father by that new and living way which He hath opened to you—why, instead of at all doing this, we are found—many of us are found — wavering, undecided, slow of heart to believe such glorious tidings; we go about to establish our own righteousness instead of submitting ourselves to the righteousness of God; we hesitate to accept, with all thankfulness, this exceeding, this unbought salvation!

But, brethren, while this is our case we shall never know peace, never enjoy the 'consolation' that is in Christ. There is no rest except for the man who has sought and found the Messiah, who reposes in humble trust on His finished work;

on 'the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction,' made by Him upon the cross.

What, then, we have immediately before us as the chief lesson of this Gospel, is to pray God to increase our faith, to pray God to give us such a clear view of His purpose towards us in Jesus Christ, that we may not look for salvation anywhere but in Him; to pray that when smarting under a sense of sin we may seek relief in the only right quarter—may not look for it in the weak and beggarly elements of our own devising, but may go at once to Jesus Christ; may believe and be sure that He is, what John the Baptist pointed Him out to be, the 'Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!'

That, I think, is the first lesson to be learned from this miracle. The woman with an issue of blood twelve years is a witness to us—one of many witnesses — of the power of faith. We, suffering like her, from a malady of long duration, bearing about with us the burden of an incurable ailment — the plague of our sins, are here shown how and where we may be healed. We may be healed, as she was healed, by having recourse to Jesus Christ; by coming to Him as she came, in faith, nothing doubting; by coming to Him that He may staunch the 'issue of blood' that drains away our health and our very life; may cleanse us from the guilt

and from the power of our sin,—'If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole!'

That is one lesson to be gathered from the account before us; and a second is this: that we openly confess our Healer; that we shrink not from public avowal of our Redeemer; that we hide not from others what He has done for our soul. The poor woman in the Gospel was, we have seen, drawn forth from her secluded position behind our Lord, and compelled openly and before all the people to confess her Benefactor. She was not allowed to go back to her home undiscovered, and there to feed on Christ in secret meditation; she was constrained, then and there, in the midst of that great concourse, to acknowledge Him—to say wherefore she had touched Him, and with what result—how she was made perfectly whole!

Surely this should teach us very plainly that we owe a duty to our gracious Lord which may not be left undone without reproach, and that is, to confess Him before men, to make public acknowledgment of His mercy, to show forth our thankfulness to Him in every possible way, and on every possible occasion; never to act as though we were ashamed of Him; never to steal away and desert His cause, 'as people being ashamed, steal away when they flee in battle.'

May that teaching be remembered! May we think of it now when again we are invited to ap-

proach our Lord's Table. May we, by our glad attendance there, show that we are not ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified; that it is our delight, as it is our bounden duty, to show forth the Lord's death in the way He has Himself appointed!

And may we go away from that Holy Feast full of joy and comfort! May Christ, in that ordinance, speak peace to our troubled spirit! May we go from it with an inward sense of a cure wrought in us—our sinful bodies made clean by Christ's Body, and our souls washed through His most precious Blood! and may we evermore dwell in Him, and He in us!

XXV.

THE WIDOW'S MITE.

A SERMON FOR THE LINCOLN HOSPITAL, PREACHED OCT. 9, 1870.

'Verily, I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.'—St. Mark, xii. 43, 44.

THESE words closed the Second Lesson for this morning, and the narrative there is no doubt well known to most of you. We read it in two out of the four Gospels: in St. Luke as well as in St. Mark. It is short, it is touching, and it is instructive; a passage well suited for us to meditate upon at this moment, quite in harmony with the business I have now in hand, which is to enlist your sympathy and secure your alms on behalf of the Lincoln County Hospital.

I have already on other occasions spoken at length about the hospital: its great usefulness, its claim upon us for support; and I will not repeat what I have said; I would rather keep your

thoughts for a few minutes fixed on that familiar page of Christ's Gospel from whence my text is taken, and which, if we read it aright, will serve better than any lengthened argument, to quicken in our hearts the flame of charity,—will provoke us to love and good works.

Our Lord had been teaching in the temple, and when He had ended His saying, He sat down 'over against the treasury.' 'The treasury' was a chest in which were kept the offerings of the people. It was first set up in the temple in the reign of Jehoash, to hold the money which was and brought in for the repairs of the Lord's house; it appears to have been kept ever afterwards there as a receptacle for charitable alms.

Our Lord took His seat 'over against the treasury,' and watched the people as they cast money into the chest; and 'many that were rich cast in much.'

Let us pause at these words: 'Many that were rich cast in much.' That is a testimony to the liberality of rich men among a nation who have ever been remarkable rather for acquiring than for distributing wealth. 'Many of the rich'—the rich Jews—'cast in much.'

And to the credit of that people—now scattered and peeled,—be it said, that in these our days noble examples have been seen of their rich men making a good and liberal use of their riches. If

the Jew be addicted,—too much addicted to scraping money together,—yet when it is scraped together he can sometimes use it well and wisely. And many a rich Christian may take a lesson in this respect from the conduct of his Hebrew brother. Not that generally our wealthy classes are backward in the service of charity, far from it. The subscriptions that we so often see advertised from the great houses of our London merchants and bankers tell another tale. They are a proof that great wealth and great giving often go together: that whatever be the prominent want of our day, whether to assist the sick and wounded in a foreign war, or to build and maintain hospitals for our sick at home, or to restore the great temple of Christ in our chief city, or any other notable occasion for help, the wealthy citizens of London are ever the foremost to contribute. 'Many of the rich cast in much.'

I trust it will never be otherwise. Riches are a great snare. It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. The possession of great wealth does undoubtedly bring peril with it,—peril to the soul. The only way to come clear of that peril is to regard our riches as a trust, to be administered to the glory of God and to the good of our fellow-creatures.

Then they cease to do a man harm. Nay, they are turned into a blessing. They not only

relieve want, but they are abundant by many thanksgivings—thanksgivings on the part of the grateful receiver of our bounty—unto God! And thus they are deprived of their power to hurt: they become no more an occasion of falling, they become an occasion of doing good.

It is right then, fit and proper, that when there are collections for works of charity the rich man should be always the chief giver: that his alms should bear some proportion to his substance; that they should not be niggard alms,—not doled out reluctantly and grudgingly,—but large alms, offered willingly in the spirit of that rich man who said to Jesus, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor!'

It is right and fit, I say, and according to reason, that if we have much we should give plenteously: be merciful after our power. Yes; and it is expected of us. 'Charge them,' writes the apostle St. Paul (1 Tim. vi.), 'charge them who are rich in this world that they be ready to give and glad to distribute.' It is sad and grievous whenever this is forgotten; much harm is done by too tight a hold upon riches.

'This have I seen,' writes the wisest of men; 'this have I seen; riches kept for the owner to their hurt.' 'There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing,'—nothing that will last,—nothing that will stand him instead in the day of reckon-

ing. While on the other it is said, in that same passage, 'There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches!'

So far, then, of the first words of the narrative; I cannot leave them without inviting those of you who have enough and to spare of this world's goods, who as compared with many may be called rich, to keep before you in your giving to-day, and on all like occasions, the example of the wealthy Israelites. Jesus, who saw their offerings, sees yours. 'He sits over against the treasury,' and beholds His people how they cast their money into the treasury of God. He knows, intimately and closely, what is the condition of each: how much each can afford to give; how much to each has been given. He needeth not that any should tell Him. Let Him not look upon an unworthy offering,—'Freely ye have received, freely give,'—bear in mind the words we have dwelt upon, 'Many that were rich cast in much!'

'And there came,' goes on the narrative, 'a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance: but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.'

It is clear from this, that it is not the amount which a person may give in charity which is the main thing,—not that which constitutes the chief value of a gift. The real value is in the spirit of the giver, when it is given out of a cheerful mind; and God judges of the gift, not by its largeness, but by the proportion it holds with the means of the giver.

I think, too, we may go further, and say that in His sight, charity that is done at the cost of self-denial, which puts the giver to the necessity of sparing what he needs for his own comfort or pleasure, is ever the more acceptable charity. It is not that God refuses the rich man's offering,—far otherwise,—He accepts it, and blesses it. But He looks with peculiar favour on the widow's mite: because it is the widow's whole means.

He sees in her giving an act of kindness, and also an act of faith, as if she had trust in Him; as if she had learnt that lesson so hard to learn,—not to be over-careful,—not to fret about to-morrow, but to cast all care upon God!

Such trust, we are sure, is never displaced. That poor widow who gave her all was the gainer, and not the loser by her giving. We may class her, and her charity, with the charity of another widow,—the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings, xvii.), who, in the extremity of the famine, met the great prophet Elijah, and who, at his request, took from her

little store the handful of meal and the few drops of oil in the bottom of the cruse, something for the prophet's own refreshment in that terrible crisis, and who never after had cause to regret her liberality. 'The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail,' till God sent the wished-for rain, and once more brought back fertility to the land.

These two widows, both she at Zarephath and she of whom we read in the text, showed a great faith and trust in God. They parted with what seemed their only earthly subsistence, for a purpose of charity. What they gave was but little: but then, in the one case, it was all,—in the other, almost all, that they had to depend upon for their living! And that giving commended them to God. They were not the poorer, but the richer for it!

In the case of one, we know that what she gave was given back to her many times; that such a blessing rested on her diminished store,—diminished by her act of charity,—that it sufficed not for a single last meal, but for the ample support of her family and her prophet guest for a long period. 'She and he, and her house, did eat thereof many days.' While in the case of the other, the widow in the Gospel,—the widow who kept back nothing,—who having but two mites gave them both; in her case we have no certain

knowledge as to her provision for the future. But we feel sure that she did not lack. And this we do know about her: that nameless though she be, she has a fame wide as the world for charity. Everywhere in all times, while Christ's holy Gospel is read,—and it will be read till the end comes,—this act of hers will stir men's hearts: and her image will live in their minds through the gracious narrative of the Evangelist.

We see her now, a widow,—a poor widow,—in the dress of poverty,—in the dress of mourning poverty stealing quietly along the temple marble floor to the chest with a bored lid that was set beside the altar to receive the offerings of the people; we see her going up to it in her humility and in her faith, and dropping into it, as she surely thought all unperceived by any eye, the two tiny coins that made up the sum of her possessions; we watch her as she glides silently away, utterly penniless, yet glad at heart, casting all her care upon God; and as she is lost to our sight amid the crowd of worshippers and offerers, we hear a voice that comes from a seat over against the treasury. It is addressed to a small circle of surrounding disciples, who look up with reverence to the Speaker, as to one who spoke with authority; we share their reverence as we listen to the Master's words, 'Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than

all they which did cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance: but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living!'

I have brought the narrative before you to-day, because I feel that there lies in it the strongest argument for charity. Whether we be rich, or whether we be poor, there is one service in which it is clearly our Lord's desire that we should all unite, and that is in giving alms.

The law of our religion is to be merciful after our power. If we are rich, we should give plenteously; if we are poor, yet should we not on that account hold back from giving. No; but do our diligence 'gladly to give of that little.'

It is this giving of our little which is so especially commended in the Gospel. Ah, and it is this giving of our little,—the poorest as well as the richest giving what they can,—that effects such great results in the sum total of charitable collections. The fund in aid of the sick and wounded in the war has reached already* the very large amount of 240,000*l.*; and how much of that has been made up of small items?—of the widow's mite,—of the labourer's pence,—of the house servant's sixpences and silver threepences!

And so it will be with the collections for the Lincoln Hospital which are being made to-day in

* October 9th, 1870.

most of the churches throughout Lincolnshire. How much of the sum gathered will come from the like humble sources?—from people who are themselves 'poor,—poor as compared with others around them.

Such alms are very precious. They are had in remembrance before God; they bring a blessing to the giver as well as to the receiver.

Some of those who give to-day, may themselves, or their sons, or daughters, before the year's end, be in-patients or out-patients of the Lincoln Hospital. Should such be the case, it will be a satisfaction to think that they, too, while they were well, had helped to make the hospital what it is: the best friend to the poor man when stricken down by the way either by accident or severe illness.

Still more will it be a cause of satisfaction if none of us here in the next twelve months should need the assistance of the Hospital. For, in that case, what we give to-day will go, every farthing of it, to the relief of others less fortunate than ourselves. And what could we desire more than to be the means,—the humble means of doing this service to our brother,—helping, with God's blessing, to give him back his lost health, or to bind up his broken limb, or in any the least way to lighten for him the trials of sickness, and to soothe him upon the bed of death?

And this we may do; this is within our reach through the aid we now give to the Hospital.

It is a real privilege then, brethren, that is ours to-day: to take part in so honourable, so Christian a work. A privilege confined not to one class, but open to all; one in which the poor man equally with the rich man has his part.

Let us all avail ourselves of it. Let us now with no misgivings for the future, in humble trust and faith in God, do as did the poor widow whose praise is in the Gospel; or, at least, do after her spirit, and with glad hand cast into God's treasury, each as he is 'disposed in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver!'

XXVI.

FOREIGN MISSIONS.

'And the Lord said unto the servants, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled.'—St. Luke, xiv. 23.

THESE words occur in the parable of the Great Supper. I use them as a text to-day because they put very forcibly before us what is God's will towards the heathen, viz., that they, as well as ourselves, should come to the knowledge of the truth; should form a portion of that great company who make up the Church of the Redeemer,—who are members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

These heathen, dwellers at present outside the Holy City, it is God's wish and will that His ministers, His servants, those who carry His message, should in some way reach and convert them to Christianity. 'And the Lord said unto the servants, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled.'

Let us dwell on this for a few minutes. And may we find in it a stimulus to our charity. May

we be moved by considering this word of our Lord to do something,—what we can,—ourselves to carry out God's merciful intention towards the Gentiles, to *compel them* who are yet outside, aliens and strangers, *to come in!*

Now if we look into the Gospel, we shall see that the calling of the Gentiles was always from the beginning in the mind of our Lord.

Though born of a Jewish mother, and spending all His earthly life among the Jews, He never countenanced their narrow view, that they were the exclusive objects of God's love: He always opposed that view. When they boasted that they were Abraham's children, implying that the promise centred upon them, He said that God was able out of the very stones to raise up children unto Abraham. While He gave His first care to the Jews, preached in their synagogues, taught and worked cures in their streets, showed again and again how He yearned to gather them together, as the hen doth gather her brood under her wings; while He said many words that must have been very sweet to them to hear: such as His remark to the woman of Canaan, which we read last Sunday, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs,' He yet withal made it very plain by what He said and did at other times, that Salvation,—the salva-

tion which He brought, was not for the Jews alone. 'Many shall come from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. . . . Other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also must I bring, and they shall be one fold under one shepherd.' And again, when He gave His last parting charge to the apostles whom He had chosen, what was it? Why a commandment of the very widest kind. 'Go ye unto all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.' 'Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost!'

That was God's will declared by His Son Jesus Christ concerning the Gentiles, 'That they should be fellow heirs with His ancient people, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel.'

He sent His Son, long expected, long desired, to redeem not the mere handful of people in the little land of Palestine, but all the dwellers upon the face of the broad earth, nations of every race and tongue under heaven, all mankind. That, I repeat it, is the will of God towards the Gentiles. He, the Creator, cares for all the souls that He has made. There are none so poor, so unimportant, as to be left out of the plan,—the gracious plan He has devised for saving their souls alive.

He would have the good tidings published in every corner, and amongst every people, so that from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof men might know the Lord, and worship the Lord,—and worship Him only!

And how was this great purpose of God to be accomplished? How were the tidings to get abroad? How was the truth that is in Christ Jesus to be taught so that all, from the least to the greatest, might learn it? How, but in this way, by one man telling it to another, by the agencies of Christian missionaries, men who should make it their life's business to go out and speak of Christ to those yet ignorant of Him; who should light up the dark places of the earth by bearing thither the hallowed fire of Gospel truth, and by setting it up as it were on a candlestick among them, by the appointment of a permanent ministry, so that the dwellers there might see the light, and walk in the light, and glorify Him from whom it springs, who is the Life and Light of the world!

That is God's way for evangelising the world. He will use no miracle. He will bring it about by human means. 'Faith,' writes St. Paul, 'cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. And how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written: How beautiful are the feet of them that

preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!'

Two things now, I trust, are clear. First, that God would have all men converted to Christ; that His Son's Gospel should go out into all lands. Secondly, that man is to be the agent in the matter; that when himself converted, made a Christian, he is to help in converting his brother. To go as his Lord's messenger to the heathen, and *compel them* by the force of persuasion and conviction to renounce their idolatries and superstitions and to embrace the pure and undefiled religion of the Gospel. 'And the Lord said unto the servants, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled!'

And what follows from this? Why, that we have each of us a share in the obligation; that as Christians, born and bred in the Faith, we owe it to our Lord to be His ministers and messengers to the yet unconverted part of mankind; that on us is laid the solemn charge, 'Go thou and preach the Gospel!'

I do not see how any of us, brethren, can escape,—or wish to escape from our responsibility in the matter. 'The love of Christ,' our sense of what He has done for ourselves,—gratitude for great spiritual blessings,—'constraineth us!' If we really value, as I hope and think we do, the

inestimable benefit which the Gospel has brought to us, we shall not be able to hold our tongue from telling out among the heathen what God has done for us!—we shall not wish to keep for ourselves all 'the riches of Christ,' all the provision He hath made for the soul, while so large a number of our brother-men are perishing from famine,—'not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord!' (Amos, viii. 11.) I repeat it, my brethren, while the larger part of mankind know not Him Who made them, not Him Who has died for them, we who do both know Who made us, and Who has redeemed us, cannot feel at ease if we make no effort to reach these vast masses of heathen men. The more we realise our own happy lot, our own deliverance from ignorance and superstition, the more shall we yearn to make others share with us in our blessings; the more quick and alertly shall we run on our Master's bidding, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled!'

And how shall we go? How shall we discharge our duty of being missionaries for Jesus Christ? How shall we, many of us, most of us tied down by our occupation to one spot, and one service, yet acquit ourselves of what we feel to be a debt to God, that of making known the Gospel?

We can only do it; by the hands of others.

We can only act by deputy: by finding supplies, the means of living for men who shall indeed go forth in person on the Lord's errand,—be His messengers, His heralds to the heathen.

And this is what we are asked to do to-day: to give our alms in aid of Christian Missions in Foreign Parts. We are asked, not for a great thing, but for a little thing. We are not asked to break up our home ties, to leave house, and wife, and child, for the kingdom of God's sake. There are those, not a few, who have done this, who have made every earthly sacrifice to carry out their Lord's will towards the heathen. And, doubtless, they will be counted worthy of double honour in the day of recompense!

But I do not ask such a sacrifice of you, brethren. I only ask, as I have said, for what, as compared with real missionary labours, is a very small boon; your alms, your worldly things, some portion of that wealth with which God has blessed you, to be used for a cause, which is God's very own, for advancing His honour among the heathen; for hastening on earth the coming of His kingdom.

I hope, and believe, that such an appeal will not be made in vain. Nay, I would hope that without any pressing from me, you will be forward of yourselves to help in sending missionaries abroad.

It is, we have seen, the duty of all Christians

to take part in the great work of evangelizing the world. And the work is so great that every hand is needed. None may plead to be excused. Many years,—many hundreds of years,—must go by before that happy day arrives, when all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest! We and our children, and their children to many generations, may be mouldering in our graves before 'the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ.' Slow is the progress of truth; strong and powerful the opposition of him who is the enemy to truth. But it would show great faintheartedness to despair of the final issue. It would be a grievous sin for us to hang back, and sit idle, because we can seemingly do so little; because in our short day so little advance may be perceptible in the work of converting the world. They who are directly busied in that work tell us that it is advancing: that slowly, but surely, the cloud that is upon the heathen is being lifted up; that in some of the very darkest places of the earth, as in Africa, and among the inhabitants of Madagascar, the mist is breaking, and the light of the glorious Gospel of God is beginning to dawn!

That it may shine more and more unto the perfect day must be the prayer of all true Christians! —of all who use the words of His own prayer, 'Thy kingdom come.'

Ay, 'Thy kingdom come!' we pray the prayer every day of our lives. Every one here, from the youngest to the eldest, prays that prayer.

Do we consider enough what it means? Do we view it,—we surely ought,—as a pledge daily given that we will, as far as we are able, hasten the coming of God's kingdom; that we will be ever forward to advance His way in the earth, by spreading wider and wider the knowledge of His revealed truth? Do we, I ask, reflect that by repeating the Lord's Prayer we bind ourselves to do our utmost towards the conversion of the world, —toward setting up a seat for God and for His Christ in every land where men dwell?

And have we at all redeemed our pledge? Are we active in promoting this great end? Do we give,—and are we glad to give?—according to our means, for the cause of Christ, for advancing the spread of His religion?

Surely, brethren, we ought so to do, if we mean what we say, when we pray, 'Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come!'

Let this thought move you at this moment to a willing offering. Give, brethren, as those who really desire what they ask, when they utter before God the solemn words, 'Thy kingdom come!'

Doubtless, without our feeble aid, God could, if He chose, set up His kingdom on the earth.

But He works, as I have said,—He works with human hands for His instruments; He uses one man and one nation to be His messenger to another; He sends forth His servants,—those whom He has already taken into His house,—to go unto the heathen who are as yet less fortunate, who have not yet known Him. 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in!'

If such a command apply anywhere, it applies to us here in England.

We, a people rich above most in the material for missionary service,—rich in men, rich in goods, rich in ships, rich in the possession of a pure, reformed faith,—we, before others, may consider ourselves marked out, and appointed by God to be the bearers of His message throughout the world! We cannot but see that we have great opportunities, and have had them for a long time, for propagating Christ's Gospel.

Oh, may we not fail of so noble an office! Oh, woe to us, if with our advantages, with our wealth, with our freedom, with our education, with our long enjoyment of God's mercies, we spread not the Gospel!

'Amalek was the first of the nations!' You know, brethren, the rest of the prophecy (Num. xxiv. 20). God forbid it should be fulfilled in ourselves! But surely there is danger that so it may

be. Surely we have not read the signs of our time aright, if we think that any nation can continue to prosper, and to hold a high place in God's favour, that forgets to do His plainly declared will!

We have seen what His will,—His gracious will is towards the heathen. We have heard what His command is to us concerning them: 'Go ye out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in!'

Oh, may His words sink into our hearts! Oh, may we now bear our part in this appointed service! Oh, may it not rest at our door that we have been hinderers rather than helpers to the coming of Christ's kingdom!—that the Heavenly House, owing to our slackness, is still short of its inhabitants! Oh, may we do all we can, and whenever we can, to bring in thither the halt, the maimed, the lame, and the blind,—to add to the Church of Jesus Christ some out of every land, and of every race, whom He would have to be saved!

XXVII.

THE HOLY COMMUNION.

PART I.

'And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.'—Exod. xii. 26, 27.

THESE were the words of Moses on the institution of the Passover; when he ordered, under God's direction, a lamb to be killed by each family in Israel, and its blood to be sprinkled upon the door-posts and lintel of the house. Looking forward to future days, when none would be living who shared in that great deliverance and ate of its memorial the first passover, he provided against its being forgotten hereafter by the charge which he here gives them. 'And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt,

when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.'

We must admire the wisdom of Moses in this. Religious services lose their power when they cease to be understood. If there had been no authentic account of the first passover; no record of the cause of its institution, that holy ordinance in process of time would surely have been neglected and fallen out of use. Moses guarded against this by putting down in writing and rehearsing to the people gathered before him in solemn assembly the exact narrative of what had occurred.

We must admire, I say, his wisdom in so doing; and we should also take pattern by it. If for any reason any part of our Christian service is neglected, or misunderstood, it becomes the minister's duty to call the attention of his people to that service, to set it plainly before them, and explain what may seem to want explanation in it, that so the neglect of it may cease, and those who have stood aloof may be brought in, and led to profit by their use,—their intelligent use of every portion of our Church's worship.

And this which may be said in reference to each and all of our services, applies more especially in these days to the service of the Holy Communion.

That is a part of our Church's worship which in comparison with other parts, is still greatly

neglected amongst us. Many who come both to Morning and Evening Prayer go away, as a matter of course, when the Holy Communion is administered.

Some for one reason, some for another, but the greater part, I am persuaded, from not understanding its meaning. They think it to be something which it is not. They do not know what a really comforting, refreshing, elevating service it is.

And this being so, I trust it may be of use,—I trust it may help to remove difficulties, and smooth the way for some of you to come to the Holy Communion; if I endeavour in the present, and on a future occasion, to explain as simply and plainly as I can the meaning of that most holy ordinance of our Lord, even as it is set forth in our Book of Common Prayer.

If I say what is already plain and obvious enough to many of you, bear with me for their sakes to whom the subject is not so plain; who need, though you do not, to be instructed on a matter of such great importance to their souls.

For that it is of great importance, you will all allow. Christ would never have instituted the Holy Supper in the way and at the time He did, —'in the same night that He was betrayed,'—had He not considered it to be of surpassing moment to the welfare of His people. St. Paul would not refer to it as he does in such a particular way

(1 Cor. xi.) had he not been impressed with a sense of its value: 'Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.'

No, brethren, whatever our practice in the matter may be, we must all be agreed about the importance of this Sacrament. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, said and did nothing in vain. He laid but few,—very few,—direct precepts upon us; He appointed very few ordinances to be observed by us; but He did institute, and in His holy Gospel appoint, one great ordinance; He did institute, and in His holy Gospel command us to continue a perpetual memory of His precious death until His coming again. He did say, under the most touching circumstance but a few hours before He was given up into the hands of wicked men to be crucified, 'Do this in remembrance of Me!'

Can it be right, my brethren; can we excuse ourselves, not to others, but to ourselves; can we feel comfortable, and clear of the charge of direct disobedience to our blessed Lord, while we neglect to do that which He,—and no other than He,—has appointed us to do; and the doing of which serves to recall so vividly to mind the work of His redeeming mercy? 'For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show'—make a proclamation of—'the Lord's death till He come.'

Now many, I am persuaded, err in this matter from early prejudice; many from want of sound knowledge, and careful looking into the teaching of our Church on the subject of the Holy Communion. And therefore it is that I desire to direct your attention to the service, as it stands, in our Book of Common Prayer. I have read from time to time many tracts and treatises about the Lord's Supper. But, after all, I hold that the best account of it, the most scriptural, is that which we have in the Prayer Book itself; and that for those who wish for an answer to the question, 'What mean ye by this service?' the best direction I can give is, 'Read, and read again, with serious and devout attention, the order of the administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.'

And to-day, it may be enough to confine ourselves to the introductory part of that service,—the part which is called the 'Offertory,' and to the Exhortation.

And first of the Offertory. After the sermon the minister returns to the Lord's table, and there reads one or more sentences of Scripture which bear upon the duty of almsgiving. While they are being read, the deacons, churchwardens, or other fit person appointed for that purpose, collect the alms of the people and bring them reverently to him, who then humbly presents and places them upon the holy Table.

And observe, brethren, what a fit and beautiful thing this is. Before we partake of the Holy Sacrament we join together in an act of Christian charity. We part with something, what we can spare,—what we shall never really miss,—to add to the comfort of our poorer brethren. We are not obliged to give,—we are not pressed to give. If any one feels that he cannot afford to give, he is excused,—he need feel no shame in not giving. For all true charity is spontaneous. God loveth a cheerful giver.

But for such as can afford to give,—who have something above the bare means of subsistence; who have enough and to spare,—and how many does this include?—the offertory holds out a good opportunity for the exercise of this grace of giving. It helps the rich and the busy to a duty they acknowledge, but which, perhaps, they find hard to perform to the letter, that of providing for the sick and needy; doing what our Lord insists upon as a proof of our attachment to Him: clothing, feeding, giving drink to Him in the person of His and our destitute brethren.

After the offertory comes the prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church militant, or serving their war service,—here on our earth, fighting against sin, the world, and the devil. And then follows—the communicants being now conveniently placed for receiving of the Holy Sacrament,—the

Exhortation,—and mark the solemn language in which it is clothed:—

'Dearly beloved in the Lord, ye that mind to come to the holy communion of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ, must consider how St. Paul exhorteth all persons diligently to try and examine themselves before they presume to eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup.' Next we are told what is the qualification for receiving the Sacrament worthily. It is that we receive it with a true penitent heart, having a lively and steadfast faith in Christ our Saviour, and being in perfect charity with all men. Where these three requisites are found; where there is in any man repentance, faith, and Christian love, there are the conditions of a worthy reception of the Sacrament. That person may and ought to be a communicant.

Now surely this is overlooked. People think some great pitch of unusual holiness must be reached before they come to the Lord's Table. But there is no warrant for such a notion. It is not worthiness, dear brethren, but a sense of our great unworthiness that is needed. It is not to be far above others in holiness, but to be convinced of our own sin, truly sorry for it, truly desirous to lead a better life. It is not the Pharisee with uplifted heart, looking down upon his neighbour, thanking God that he is not as other men are, who is a welcome guest at that Holy Supper, but rather the

man of a meek and contrite spirit, who knows himself to be a sinner, and confesses himself to be a sinner, and yearns for pardon and deliverance from his sins!

No. All the common excuses that we make for absenting ourselves from the Holy Communion are nought. There is,—believe me,—there is but one valid reason for not coming, and that is, a reluctance to give up our besetting sin.

Nothing but this need keep you away. All who hate their sin, all who wish to get the mastery over their sin, all who have but the beginning, the faint wish to be better, and to do better, are invited, and may come without risk or peril; nay, may come, and will come to their great comfort and benefit.

Judge therefore, yourselves, brethren. Do you desire to be delivered from your sins? Do you wish to follow your Saviour in His own way? Do you believe in His power to forgive sins? Have you withal kindly feelings towards your neighbours: no malice, no hatred, no envy, no ill-will, against any one? If so,—doubt it not,—you may and ought to come to the Lord's Table. You will be fit and worthy partakers of that Holy Feast. You will find in it, what thousands have found and are finding in it, the strengthening and refreshing of the soul!

Again, let me add, from this part of the ser-

vice, another and a most compelling reason why we should all of us be communicants. It is the way appointed by Christ for our remembering His most precious death upon the cross.

'And to the end that we should always remember the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour, Jesus Christ, thus dying for us, and the innumerable benefits which by His precious blood-shedding He hath obtained to us: He hath instituted and ordained holy mysteries as pledges of His love, and for a continual remembrance of His death to our great and endless comfort.'

Do, I beg you, weigh well these words. They tell us—did we need to know it—why the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was ever ordered—even for this — that we might keep in undying memory the great truth of our Redemption by the Death of Christ,—His death upon the cross,—that we might have it brought home to us with touching power, that once for us, the Son of God, Jesus Christ the Righteous, did vouchsafe to die,—to die that we might live,—did give Himself for us, the just for the unjust, 'an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.'

There is no Christian person who does not share in the benefit of that Death. There ought to be no Christian person who does not delight to

remember that Death to show it forth, to profess openly his belief in what it has effected, to glory in it, and rest upon it as the ground of his acceptance with God. How then can such a man, how can any Christian turn aside from the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

For what is that Holy Supper? is it not, as we have seen,—is it not the best and fittest, the tenderest and holiest memorial of your Lord's sacrifice? What other thing, so vividly, so plainly, so emphatically, so unreservedly, preaches to us the Atonement? declares that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us; that we are redeemed to God, not 'with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot?'

Oh, brethren, do turn this matter over and over in your minds. Do think what you lose by keeping away from the Lord's Table! Do think of the reasons I have given why you should come. I shall hope at another time to take you further in the Communion Service, and to add many more reasons for your being communicants. In the meanwhile I would ask you,—each one of you,—to study well that service for yourselves. I would also ask you to give full weight to this one consideration; how better can I honour Jesus Christ, how can I so well show my gratitude to Him for

His exceeding love in dying for me, as by attending to His last request: doing that which He almost with His latest breath appointed for me to do, eating the bread, and drinking the wine, in Remembrance of Him?

XXVIII.

THE HOLY COMMUNION.

PART II.

'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.'—Prov. xxviii. 13.

IN a late sermon, I called your attention to the service of the Holy Communion. Speaking from this text, 'What mean ye by this service?' I entered into an examination of the early part of that service, and carried it out as far as the end of the Exhortation, beginning 'Dearly beloved in the Lord.'

My design was to remove, if I could, some hindrances to your coming to the Holy Communion; to show you out of the service itself how reasonable a thing it is, how fit, how comforting, how full of health and refreshment to the soul; to show you that the common excuses which men make for not coming to the Lord's Table are not valid; that there is nothing to keep any man from coming there but one cause: his being at

the time in deadly sin; his living and intending to go on living in some practice of evil which he knows to be forbidden him by God's holy law. Saving this,—this wilful hardening of the soul against God,—a state that I cannot think is likely to be the state of any one who hears me,—saving this, there is, I hold, no sufficient cause by which we as Christian men,—men who profess the faith of Christ crucified,—can cloak our neglect of this His most clear and most touching appointment.

For that it is a most touching appointment is seen on the very face of it. Often and often as we read the account in the Gospels, we never read it without our hearts acknowledging its power.

The Saviour sitting for the last time with His beloved apostles at their evening meal; His heart saddened with the certain knowledge of His coming suffering, and the parting it involved from those who had continued with Him in His temptation—that strong expression of His love and sorrow at leaving them: 'With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer'—His action at the table, when 'He took bread and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me—likewise, also, the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for

you, and for many for the remission of sins; drink ye all of it'—who does not feel the beauty and tenderness of this? In whose heart is not the whole scene imprinted?

Whatever our own practice, brethren, may be regarding this sacrament, we must all be agreed that it is an institution or ordinance of our Lord's wonderfully adapted to the purpose for which He intended it, viz., to be the perpetual memorial of His precious death, and the means of conveying to His people the benefit of that death,—the means, —the most sure means of uniting us in one bond with Him our great Head and Saviour, and in Him with one another; in other words, the 'Sacrament,' as it is so well defined in our XXVIII Article, of our Redemption by Christ's death; insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, 'The Bread which we break is the partaking of the Body of Christ: and likewise the Cup of blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ.'

But to go on to that part of the Communion Service where we left off. After the Exhortation follows the Invitation: a call on those present to 'draw near,'—to 'draw near with faith,'—without which the mere coming up in the body to the Lord's Table would avail nothing; and to take the Holy Sacrament to their comfort, having first prepared themselves so to do by the humble con-

fession of their sins, made, as is most fitting, in the humblest and lowliest posture, 'meekly kneeling on their knees.'

Then comes the Confession itself, and then the Absolution, on both of which let me say a few words.

And first of the Confession. Confession of sin forms, as you know, a part of our Church's daily service, both of her morning and evening prayer. It ought to form a part of our private daily prayers as well. There is no day on which we do not contract some stain of sin, some spot and defilement to our soul, which requires to be wiped out in the blood of Jesus Christ, applied through earnest, heartfelt repentance.

And the first step in repentance is always confession, open avowal of our fault,—confession, I mean, not to man but to Almighty God, the great Seer into and Searcher of our hearts; and Who in His word has expressly demanded from us such an acknowledgment: 'Whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.'

But if confession of sin is good for us and required of us at other times, and in other places, at no time, and in no place, can it be more good, and more necessary, than when we gather together at the Table of our Lord. There is a peculiar fitness in our confession of sin then and there.

And why? Because at the Sacrament the one thing brought most vividly before us is the Atonement,—the death of Christ upon the cross for guilty men, the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction that He made there by His own oblation of Himself once offered for the sins of the whole world!

On that death we rest our hope of forgiveness. Should we not then in seeking forgiveness, seek it with humble and contrite hearts? Should we not be 'truly and earnestly' penitent, remembering the exceeding bitter woe to which the Holy One of God was subjected on our behalf?

You will, I am sure, say that we should. You will see of yourselves that no language can be too lowly, no cry to God for pardon too hearty, no expression of sorrow too large, no disclaiming of any good in ourselves too unlimited, when we come before God as suppliants for His mercy,—and seek that mercy on this ground alone, that His dear Son Jesus Christ died for us.

Observe, then, the language which our Church puts into our mouth at such a time. Mark the force and fulness of that confession of sin which is appointed to be made,—to be made 'in the name of all those that are minded to receive the Holy Communion, by one of the ministers; both he and all the people kneeling humbly upon their knees, and saying, 'Almighty God, Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men: we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness which we from time to time most grievously have committed by thought, word, and deed, against Thy divine Majesty, provoking most justly Thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings: The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father. For Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past; And grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please Thee in newness of life, to the honour and glory of Thy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

Can we find, can we devise words more solemn, more suitable in which to make our humble confession to Almighty God? Do we not feel how exactly they express the sorrow and contrition of a truly penitent spirit?

I question if in all the Prayer-book, or in any other book of devotion, you will find such apposite and touching words,—such weighty and sonorous cadences in which to unburden our hearts before God.

It has been well remarked that 'if our repentance be but answerable to the form' of words we here employ, 'it is impossible it should ever be more hearty and sincere.'

And then, look at what follows after we have joined in this confession,—after we have taken our burden,—our intolerable load, and laid it down at God's feet, see what becomes of it there. Hear what our Church says of God's willingness to remit sin,—to let the oppressed go free,—listen to the words of the Absolution:

'Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Who of His great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him; Have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

There is no assertion here, you will notice, of priestly authority; no claim on man's part to forgive sins. All is referred to Almighty God, and to His Fatherly love for His creatures.

But though we as God's ministers claim no power to forgive sins, though our part is simply declaratory,—to be the messengers of His mercy, the bringers and tellers, not the procurers of His pardon,—still to a man of a tender, troubled conscience, it must, we should think, be a source of comfort to have that message told, that mercy brought nigh. Our human heart is subject to extremes. At one time we are lifted up with pride, and think we can stand in our own strength, and

need no mediator between our soul and God. At another time we are depressed, and take the gloomiest view of our condition, and can with difficulty believe that sinners like ourselves can possibly be saved.

It is well that we should be provided, as we are in our Church, with a safeguard against either error. It is well that we should be warned against false security, and it is well that we should not be left without support in the hour of weakness.

It is well—most well—that no penitent soul should be left to drown beneath the water-flood of despair; that ere it sink quite overwhelmed some hand of help should be stretched out, some voice be heard above the tempest guiding it into an haven of peace.

And such a voice is that which sounds in our Absolution. It says,—and says with authority,—to every despairing soul, 'Be of good cheer!' 'Be not afraid!' 'Almighty God, our heavenly Father, of His great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him!'

Ponder these assuring words; lay them up in your inmost heart. They contain the very essence of the Gospel; the good news which Christ the Lord came down from heaven to deliver. God is not, as He was thought to be by them of old, stern, vindictive, unpitying; God is love; God is

pity; God is a pardoner; God has no pleasure in pursuing the sinner to the death; God delighteth in showing mercy; God gave His only-begotten Son unto the world that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life; God promises forgiveness of sin, not to one or two, but 'to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him!'

Ponder, I say, these comfortable words, and put them to the proof. Turn to God this day, O fearful but contrite soul; turn to God with hearty repentance, and seal that repentance by partaking of the Holy Feast.

Seize the opportunity which it presents to you of seeking to be at peace with God; of laying down at your Saviour's cross the intolerable weight of remembered sin, and of receiving the assurance that God for Christ's dear sake hath put it away!

For hear what comfortable words our Saviour saith unto all that truly turn to Him: 'Come unto Me all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.'

Hear, also, what St. Paul saith, 'This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!'

Hear, also, what St. John saith, 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus

Christ, the Righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins.'

'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.'

XXIX.

SOCIETY FOR BUILDING AND REPAIRING CHURCHES.

'And David built there an altar unto the Lord; and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.' —2 Sam. xxiv. 25.

THESE are the concluding words of the First Lesson for this Evening Service (VII after Trinity). They describe what David did under very trying circumstances, and with what success: 'He built an altar unto the Lord: and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings; and he prevailed: God was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.'

And what had caused the plague? David's pride; David's sin in numbering the people. In a time of peace, David, elated by prosperity, had ordered a census of the tribes. He had done so in spite of the remonstrance of his chief captain Joab, who had sought to check the king's folly. But David had persisted in indulging his vanity. He thought to make a show of his strength. He

forgot that God was the real strength of Israel. He forgot that Israel was not like any other nation; that it was a nation upheld, made strong by the Almighty; that God did not want soldiers; that He saved not by the multitude of an host; that He saved by His own great might. David forgot this; and in his forgetfulness he was guilty of a great sin,—the sin of presumption. He showed too a want of confidence in God; he had left out of mind that promise written in the law, 'When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.' (Deut. xx. 1.)

David, I say, had forgotten the peculiar condition of Israel: the special promises made to them of support and defence from God. He sought for security in an arm of flesh. He sought to build up a bulwark of power for himself by an array of numbers. Instead of making his boast of God all the day long, as he had hitherto done, he looked for matter of boastfulness in the multitude,—the increased multitude of his people.

That was David's sin,—and for that sin he was sorely punished. God gave him by the mouth of the prophet Gad a choice of three evils, 'Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies

while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land?'

David chose the last. He preferred, as he humbly said, to fall into the hand of God rather than into the hand of man. 'So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel,'—a terrible and deadly pestilence,—'from morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men.'

The destruction might have gone further but for David's hearty and humble repentance. It stopped just as it had reached Jerusalem, at the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. On that spot the angel of death was stayed. And how? Gad the prophet directed David to rear an altar unto the Lord, and offer sacrifice. This David did, buying the threshing-floor and oxen for sacrifice of Araunah for fifty shekels of silver. 'And he built there an altar,'—a reared pile of stones,—'and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings,' and he was accepted. 'The Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.'

Yes, he was accepted in that he feared; in that he sorrowed unto repentance; 'I have sinned and done wickedly.' The voice of that sorrowful cry entered into the ears of the Lord. God heard it in heaven, His dwelling-place, and forgave the sin of His servant, and took away His sore judg-

ment from off the land,—'the plague was stayed from Israel.'

And this is written for our learning. And the lesson that it reads us is one that bears closely on the matter I have in hand to-day, which is to ask your alms on behalf of the 'Society for Building and Repairing of Churches and Chapels in England and Wales.'

Let us see what the lesson is. Surely it is this, that piety, the homage and worship due to Almighty God, is ever the best safeguard of a nation; their best security against harm; their best refuge under trouble; the antidote and remedy of the ill that comes of man's corrupt heart and practice, that which acts as a counterweight to pride, to presumption, to carelessness and forgetfulness of God in the land.

That is the lesson taught plainly and strikingly in the chapter we have heard.

Israel in the person of their head and king had sinned. They had forgotten God. They had gone in the way of their own heart. A plague had been sent as a scourge from God, and as a token of His displeasure. They recognised it as His scourge. They had confessed that they had sinned; they sought to be forgiven; they approached God, as He ought ever to be approached by His creatures, with reverence and godly fear, and they were accepted. 'The Lord was intreated

for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.'

And this has been recorded, I said, for our learning; this bears on the subject that is before us to-day.

Piety, it will be granted, is the safeguard of a nation. The worship of God,—His true worship,—His pure worship,—has more to do with our peace and prosperity as a people than any other thing.

Now what so much promotes piety,—what so surely secures the worship,—the true, pure worship of God in a country like ours,—as the building and maintaining of Christian churches?

I ask you, brethren, to think the matter over in your mind. And I am sure you will all agree in your answer to this question, Whether you be Church people, or whether you dissent from the Church, so that you only are Christians, lovers of God and of His dear Son Jesus Christ; lovers of the Gospel; lovers of God's holy word;—you will, I feel, all of you, allow that the cause of piety and religion is greatly advanced and assisted by the building and repairing of churches amongst us.

For what are churches? Places in which God is worshipped; places, mind you, not only in which God's word is preached, but places in which He is worshipped, prayed to, praised, His mercy intreated, His goodness, and power, and Godhead

acknowledged, His Name confessed and adored; places in which when two or three are met together to make their supplication before Him with one mind and one mouth, He has promised to be present to hear and to grant their requests; places where the sacraments of the Gospel, the ordinances of Jesus Christ which He Himself has appointed, and which are 'generally necessary to salvation,' are freely dispensed to the comfort and strengthening of our souls!

Such are churches,—English churches,—not simply great assembly rooms with a pulpit out of which one poor weak mortal may deliver sermons to his fellow-mortals; not simply preaching-houses, but houses of solemn prayer; places of worship rightly so called; where God is approached in language most reverent, most humble, most carefully weighed and digested,—not with rambling cries made out of the heat of the moment, but with well-considered and well-composed prayers,—such as those we have in our Prayer-book,—prayers, many of them gathered word for word out of the Scriptures,—prayers in which all present may join, because all know them beforehand,—which are not long prayers,—which do not deal in vain repetitions,—which are suited to the wants and necessities of all, are, as their name shows, common prayers.

Such are churches: places in which we gather

together at fixed times, on fixed days throughout the breadth and length of the land, to join, first of all, in God's public worship. We come to these churches for other things; we come to hear sermons, to have God's holy word read and expounded; but, first of all, the leading purpose of our assembling together in the Church, is, never forget it, to worship; to fall down and kneel before the Lord our Maker,—the great, the good, the holy Lord God; to give Him thanks for the benefits,—the countless benefits we have received at His hands; to set forth His most worthy praise in hymns, and psalms, and canticles; to pray to Him; to ask of Him what we most want, those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.

That is the first great object for which churches are built, that is the great purpose they serve. They secure to a nation the public expression of its religion. They are tabernacles of witness in the land that the Lord He is God; that He made us, and not we ourselves; that we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

And on that ground I might fairly rest my appeal to you for help to-day,—and on that ground alone. But there is more yet to be said of the benefit and blessing that comes from building and repairing churches.

A church,—a new church,—means something

more than four walls and a roof, with a tower or a steeple at one end. It means the opening of a fresh spring in the wilderness,—a new source of grace in a neighbourhood,—it means the permanent teaching and ministry of God's word.

Attached to every church there must be a clergyman,—a resident minister of Christ's holy religion,—one whose home is on the spot,—not removable at the end of the year, but located permanently in the parish,—whose business it is to be a messenger, watchman, steward of the Lord, to minister, to serve, not in the Church only, but out of the Church as well; to visit the sick and the afflicted, to seek for those who have gone astray and are out of the way, to superintend the Church school, often the only one in the place, and generally to be the friend and adviser, the helper and comforter, of all around him, and that not only in spiritual things, but in all things, wherever and whenever he can do them any good.

That is the English parish clergyman,—the established minister,—whom you will find whenever a new church is built. So that in giving money to build a church you are really giving to secure a permanent clergyman in a district that before had been without one.

A clergyman,—and it may be a clergyman's family,—every member of which will do his or her part in the work of the ministry; will seek, in

their place, and according to their ability, to promote sound piety and religion,—the piety and religion of the Church of England,—at their door.

And surely, brethren, surely this is no small advantage. This is an advantage the worth of which will only be fully known when it is too late; when the voices of those who now clamour for disestablishment shall have prevailed, and England cuts the cord that now binds Church and State together, so throwing away the heritage of the past, the best security for the continuance of her people in the path of true religion and godliness!

Such a calamity will not happen in our day. But you may hear it talked about and discussed already. Let those who join in such discussions look well to the consequence. Let them think twice, yea thrice, before they commit themselves to views which are, I am persuaded, fraught with infinite mischief to our country. Let them have more pity on the great masses of our labouring people, who, if Church and State were separated, would be the greatest losers by the change,—would no longer have at their call, in the minister of the Establishment, a ready friend and helper: one who has many opportunities of doing them good, and who gladly uses those opportunities; one, who, while he ministers to all classes and cares for the

good of all, so does he regard it as his especial province 'to remember the poor,' to befriend, where he can, those who most need befriending.

I repeat it, brethren, let those who cry out for disestablishment, weigh well the consequence. Let them beware how they urge on a movement, which once set agoing may be hard to check; a movement which threatens to deprive England of what I hold to be among her very chiefest blessings,—the blessing of a permanent, resident, educated, independent ministry.

Once again, England, rich, and great, and powerful as she is, has many enemies,—and the worst enemy of all is ungodliness. What we have most to fear in the years to come is the growth of impiety amongst our own people. There is a spirit abroad that kicks at the restraints of religion. There are those amongst us who openly deny God; who mock at His word, who teach just the contrary to His word; who would upset, if they could, the present order of society; men, I fear not a few, who have revived the old heathen cry, 'Let us eat, and drink, for to-morrow we die,' —men, who because they have no hope, no belief in a life to come, are for taking all they can get, no matter how, of what this poor present life affords.

Now such views are subversive of all that is really valuable: they degrade man to the level

of the brutes; they cut off from him his dearest hope; they deprive him of any high motive of conduct; they tend to make him, by a sure process, sensual, earthly, devilish!

And these views are becoming common: they are spreading each year wider and wider,—spreading like that which they are,—a deadly pestilence,—a plague fatal to man: destructive both of body and soul.

Now what steps shall we take to stay this pestilence,—this deadly plague of unbelief and ungodliness which has broken out amongst us, ay, that has a strong grip upon us? How, I ask, shall we, who are yet free, keep off the contagion: guard ourselves and our families, our growing boys and girls from the contaminating effect of this mischief, of these soul-killing, atheistic views and practices?

I know but one remedy, and that is, by holding firm ourselves by God, keeping true to our early faith, and doing all we can to promote its growth,—the growth of true Christian piety around us.

One great means of effecting this will be, as we have seen, the building of churches, and re-establishing of a permanent ministry wherever it is lacking throughout the land.

The angel of death,—the angel that smote the people was arrested, and driven back before the

hearty repentance and supplication of King David. There, on that very spot, where the mischief was rampant, the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, David reared a new altar, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. 'And so the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel!'

May we not hope that so it will be still? May we not hope that a fresh, vigorous effort to build up the houses of God in our land, to provide ever more and more as our population thickens for their being grounded in the true faith through the sound teaching of our English Church, will not be vain? Is it not in keeping with past experience to expect that God's own blessing will wait upon us in our endeavour to stop the water-flood of wickedness and impiety in our land; and that, as of old, so now again, the rearing of new altars, where the lamp of holy praise may be kept lighted and burning, and on which the dear memorial of the one great peace-offering may be laid continually, will be attended with the best results? —with this result, the arrest of that deadly pestilence, which has already slain its thousands amongst us, and the bringing back of health,— spiritual health to the souls of our people,—the establishing of the nation more firmly in the old paths, which some would unthinkingly and unwisely ask us to abandon.

I have only now, brethren, to urge on all who are in the church to-day, to lend a helping hand in this good work.

You have in this parish as fair and seemly a house of God as need be desired. The cost of its repairs was the loving work of a generation now alas!—well-nigh passed from amongst us. Do for others what they have done for you. Give—and give gladly—to provide fit and seemly places of worship for your brethren in other parts of the land.

You cannot put your money, be it a little or much, to a more worthy use; you cannot put it to a more patriotic use. The multiplying churches, means, I have shown you, the multiplying of bulwarks for our country, barriers against the dangers, —the imminent dangers with which we are threatened.

Each added Christian Church, with its minister and schools, is a fresh witness before the Lord that He is God, and none else. It is a rallying point for those who love His Name, to meet and to make their supplication!

There surely will His eye look,—and look with favour. There, as erst from the threshing-floor of Araunah, shall go up the incense of an acceptable worship; there, in days of coming evil, will the Lord 'be intreated, and the plague be stayed from Israel!'

XXX.

QUAM DILECTA!

SERMON WRITTEN FOR THE RE-OPENING OF ——— CHURCH.

'Oh, how amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of Hosts.'—Ps. lxxxiv. 1.

IT is generally thought that the Psalm out of which these words are taken, was composed by David during his exile from Jerusalem, occasioned by the treachery and usurpation of Absalom. In his sad banishment the king's heart turned with a natural tenderness and regret to what had been his joy and comfort while yet he reigned undisturbed in Zion, even to the place where he had worshipped God,—the Holy Temple —the Lord's House,—'Oh, how amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of Hosts! My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God!'

The same note of tender longing for God's interrupted service is struck in another Psalm, the

forty-second: 'Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God! My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God, when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?' And again, in Ps. xliii., evidently written during his exile, when he went heavily, oppressed by his enemy, 'Oh, send out Thy light and Thy truth that they may lead me, and bring me unto Thy holy hill and to Thy dwelling, that I may go unto the altar of God, even unto the God of my joy and gladness.'

But to keep to Psalm lxxxiv. David, in his love and longing for the courts of God's House on Mount Zion, seems to envy the winged birds, which, not banished like himself, were free to find their home under the shelter of that hallowed roof. 'Yea,' he says, 'the sparrow hath found her an house, and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young; even Thy altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God! Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House: they will be alway praising Thee!'

Now such language as this, such loving appreciation of the blessedness of God's worship; such a delight in the place where He was worshipped; such a sense of its fair beauty; such a longing to be there, and to be a sharer in the sacred services of the sanctuary, may well find an echo in many a Christian's heart,—an echo in your hearts, my

brethren, who are met together to-day to celebrate the re-opening of your parish church.

You can, I think, hardly take your seat here, and look round at the building in which you are assembled, and not feel the fitness and force of these old words of David, 'Oh, how amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of hosts! . . . . . Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House, they will be alway praising Thee!'

It will be my aim, in this sermon, to deepen, if I may, that feeling,—to impress upon you the loveliness of God's House, and the beauty, and comfort, and blessedness of those services which are connected with it and performed in it; I shall try to show that it is not for nothing that care, and pain, and cost, and thought, and skill are bestowed so abundantly in these days in building and adorning God's House,—that it is right, fit, and our bounden duty to do this. And, further, I would say a word, hardly necessary as it must appear to some of you, about the value and privileges of our Christian worship, such as have long been used and enjoyed in our English Reformed Church.

For I do not forget, brethren, nor do you forget, that church-building and church-restoration are only means to a higher end,—even to this end,—to the building up of souls in our most holy faith, —the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,—building

them up and establishing them in that faith through God's blessing accompanying the means of grace open to them in His House, through the preaching of His pure word, the due administering of Christ's holy sacraments, the sanctifying, softening, humbling, elevating influence of common prayer.

That, we shall all admit, is the end to be aimed at in church-restoration and enlargement,—the glory of God, and the increase of true piety among our people. May such, in its measure, be the result of what has been done here! May the re-opening of your parish church and your re-admission in it to the means of grace, be followed by a large outpouring of the divine blessing, without which we can do nothing! For 'except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it!'

And, first, let me say a few words on the outward loveliness of this holy place. 'Oh, how amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of hosts!' The art and the skill, the taste and culture of man as well as his material wealth, are employed to their best use when engaged in such a work as this, in building and adorning God's House. David, who was himself denied the honour that he coveted of building God's Temple in Jerusalem,—David, the most spiritual of men, gave instructions to his son Solomon concerning it. And he himself prepared large materials for the work,—one hundred thousand

talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver, and brass and iron without weight; timber also and stone in abundance. 'For,' said he, 'the House that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries.' (1 Chron. xxii.)

And in this he is an example,—an example that we ought to follow. Surely, in days like these, when wealth and luxury are spread so wide, it is right, and for our good, that there should be a channel for our dangerous superfluity in the care and adornment of God's House. Surely the world is not so altered since the days of David, not the 'old order' which has passed so alien to the new, but that still in every place where men worship God, His temple should have the pre-eminence,—should be the fairest and most seemly building that our hands can raise.

It is not, brethren, that we attach undue importance to material things,—to mere wood and stone 'graven by art and man's device,'—it is not that we think to attract God's notice, and to win His favour by the beauty of the fabric that we build to His honour; it is not that we think to localise the divine presence, and that we are insensible to that lofty utterance of the great temple-builder of old. 'Will God, indeed, dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven,—and the heaven of

heavens cannot contain Thee,—how much less this House that I have builded?'

No; but it is a sense of fitness, of propriety, of what is due from the creature to the Creator; a feeling that of all we have the best should be given to Him; that it would be a shame and a reproach to us to dwell in our rich houses, while the House of God goes uncared for, is left in neglect, or out of repair, and not only that, but while it bears no token of having attracted to it any much thought, any free-will offerings of our hand, any outlay of money, any precious gifts that might help to render it less unworthy of its holy purposes, a fitter tabernacle in which to accomplish the service of God!

That, I think, is the feeling which mainly actuates church-builders and church-restorers; which, I doubt it not, has actuated you in this place.

You have said, by what you have done here, that the House of God in this parish should not lack anything to fit it for its holy use; should be made, as far as you could make it, a fit sanctuary, —'a tabernacle of witness,'—a building which by its very look and arrangement should show what it is: a Christian Church,—a building where men meet to worship God in Jesus Christ,—to offer up common prayer,—to set forth God's praise,—to hear and to receive His most holy word.

And such it surely is now, firm-built and strong; open throughout, with no differences or distinction in the seats; offering to the poor equally with the rich convenient room,—room for sitting, room for kneeling,—furnished with all that is required for Christian worship, nothing wanting, and nothing superfluous to the full and decent performance of our modest, sober, reformed English service; it is a church, indeed, of which to be proud, which when you who restored it are laid to your rest, it may be beneath the shelter of these very walls, shall testify to the next generation that their fathers in this place loved God's House, and cared for His holy worship.

And when I speak of the fitness and beauty of the present building, I do not forget the old church, nor would I draw any disparaging comparison between it and the new one. For that old church was dear to me,—aye! and to others also,—and is associated in my mind with most tender and precious recollections. I have the image of it now before me, and of many a face that once frequented it,—of some, alas, whom we shall see no more again in this world!

That old church, too, was not without its beauty. It shows, as does the present one, marks of care and taste in its arrangements. It bore witness to loving treatment at the hands of a former generation. In an age when church architecture was well-

nigh lost; in an age when indifferentism laid heavily upon us, those who lived here restored and beautified their parish church. They spared no cost, no pains, to make it worthy of its purpose. While in other spots the churches of our communion were, too many of them, suffering from neglect and decay, allowed to remain sordid and unsightly; the church in this parish was, under its then venerable vicar, rescued from such a condition; its walls rebuilt, its roof renewed, its chancel arch opened, its sittings re-arranged, its windows adorned with the rich old glass which they still retain; in short, it was made what was then regarded as a pattern church, an ornament of the district, the reasonable pride of the inhabitants of this place.

Surely it is right to mention this to-day. Surely it is due to the silent dead,—often, alas, too soon forgotten!—to speak of their work now superseded, and what they did for God's House in the days gone by!

There can be no jealousy in generous minds; least of all, in matters that concern religion. They who restored the church here some fifty years ago, restored it to the best of their ability, and with the best help that the time allowed. Had they lived now, and the work were again to be done, they would, no doubt, have profited by the progress which church architecture and church feeling has made since then. And had we lived

when they did we had not done the work any better, nay, hardly perhaps so well as they.

But, as I said, there can be no jealousy in such things,—only a holy emulation which of us shall put to the best use his means and opportunities for advancing godliness and true religion by building up the Houses of God in our land, enlarging, where needed, the place of His tent, and stretching forth the curtains of His habitation !

Again, the next point I would touch upon as growing out of the eighty-fourth Psalm, is the retreat which God's House offers to the oppressed and weary. 'My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord : my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God ! Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house, and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young, even Thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God !'

These beautiful and tender words bespeak the feelings of David when deprived by Absalom's treachery of the privileges of his old worship. His wearied spirit turned to God for rest,—to God in His accustomed House in Jerusalem.

And such words may well set us thinking on one of the many advantages of a parish church. It is a place for the weary, for the troubled, for those who find the life to go hard with them, for all who for one cause or another are oppressed in mind, body, or estate,—most of all, is it a place

of retreat for the sinner,—for the sinner when he is awakened to a sense of his sin, possessed by his iniquity, heavy laden with the burden and anguish of remembered transgressions.

To all such persons,—to the greater part of us,—working men and working women, with our hearts careful and troubled about many things, our parish church,—God's House of prayer in this place,—ought surely to be a haven of rest and peace. Here, at least, the world and its ways may cease to trouble us; here, at least, we may rest ourselves for awhile and be refreshed,—apart from the crowd,—apart from the toil,—apart from the harass and care of our common life,—rest and be refreshed by communing with God; by the hallowing influence of the place; by the great words of promise spoken here, at each of our services, to all who truly repent and unfeignedly believe God's holy Gospel.

We read, in 1 Sam. i., how Hannah in her trouble sought God's tabernacle at Shiloh; how she, a woman of sorrowful spirit, poured out her soul in that holy place before the Lord, and in so doing found relief, 'went her way,' as one that had obtained mercy, 'and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.' And so might it be with ourselves, so would it be, did we in our trouble and heaviness whensoever it oppresses us, do as she did; did we go to the Lord's House, and take

our burden there, and open to Him our grief, and show Him of our trouble? God would surely hearken and show some token upon us for good. Some loosening of the cord of our sin; some lightening of our overburdened heart; some inward feeling of relief; some whisper of the Spirit, 'Be of good cheer!' would be a witness to us that the Lord is still with His worshippers; a 'God of peace and consolation;' a God gracious and merciful, 'faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!' 'Blessed are they,'—not in David's time only, but in all times,—'blessed are they that dwell in Thy House: they will be always praising Thee! One day in Thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a doorkeeper in the House of my God, than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness!'

Once again, I have spoken of the loveliness of God's House, and of the refuge it is to the weary and troubled soul. Let me add but a very few words on the character of the service,—the service of our English Church. It is a Scriptural service,—it is a spiritual service,—it is an edifying service, adapted in every part to the wants of the soul. This service consists, as you well know, of prayer, of praise, of the reading and preaching of God's Word, and the administration of His holy sacraments.

The prayers here offered are many of them the

prayers with which Christians have prayed to God and Christ from the very earliest ages of the Church. They are not to be matched for shortness, for comprehensiveness, for beauty and melody of words; as it has been truly said of them. 'They are so judiciously contrived that the wisest may be instructed; yet so plain that the most ignorant may profit by using them. They are so full that nothing is omitted which is fit to ask in public; and so particular that they contain most things which men would ask of God in private.'

Such are our church prayers; far—very far—before any prayers that the best and most pious amongst us could make out of his own head. To gain the full benefit of such prayers it is needed that they be offered up reverently and devoutly by the minister, and seconded heartily and audibly by the assenting 'Amen' of the congregation.

Then, besides prayer,—common prayer,—praise is an essential part of our service. The 'Venite,' the 'Te Deum,' the 'Magnificat,' and other hymns between the Lessons; the daily order of the Psalms; the ascription of glory to the Holy Trinity; the Trisagion, and 'Gloria in Excelsis,' in the service of the Holy Communion; this is a part of our worship which is properly described as praise. And where shall we find nobler or more spiritual strains? How shall we better show ourselves glad before the Lord? In what more becoming lan-

guage shall we pour out our praises, and sing merrily unto the God of our strength ?

It is indeed, brethren, a part of our worship well provided for in our Liturgy. Oh, that we only all took part in it ! Oh, that we joined in it more generally and heartily, and so realised the apostle's words about glorifying God 'with one mind and one mouth !' 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House, they will be alway praising Thee !'

And next consider for a moment that most important part of our service, the reading and preaching of God's Word.

What an opportunity is here for becoming acquainted with those Holy Scriptures which make wise unto salvation ! How much of God's Word might be carried away in the course of the year by an attentive listener ? How much might be learnt from the morning and evening lessons ; from the Epistle and Gospel ; yes, and from the sermon, if we would only think as little as possible about the preacher, his manner and style, and think rather of the message he has to deliver, and in whose name he delivers it. For the word of God is quick and powerful, and even when handled by an unskilful hand, has still a mighty force in it of itself,—power to reach the dull heart, and to arouse the sleeping conscience, and to cheer and comfort the downcast soul, and to recall the wanderer, and to urge on the Christian who is running well, to

press forward with increased vigour in the path that leadeth unto life!

Nor is this all; besides prayer, and praise, and the reading and preaching of God's Word, there are,—essential parts of our church's service,—Christ's own holy sacraments,—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

The one, Baptism, by which as by an instrument we are grafted into the Church, the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God, are visibly signed and sealed. The other, the Supper of the Lord,—the sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death,—the everlasting memorial and proclamation of the Atonement. And not only that—not only the remembrance of the death on Calvary, but the means by which we lay hold on and appropriate to ourselves the benefits of that death—by which we are made one with Christ, and Christ one with us; by which we have fellowship with God and with one another. 'For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread,'—that bread that came down from heaven to be our spiritual food and life-giving sustenance, 'That a man might eat thereof and not die!'

Such are the services of this holy place,—services which are offered with little variation in the many thousand churches of our land. I know not that you will find in any other communion of

Christians services more truly spiritual, more scriptural, more edifying, better calculated to promote sober piety and godliness, alike removed from fanaticism on one side, and superstition and extravagance on the other.

Let me urge you, brethren,—and I use the word not as a word of course and custom, but because of the old bond which once bound us together,—a bond by me never to be forgotten,—let me urge you, brethren, to make a full and thankful use of your religious opportunities in this House of God. Use your parish church, so beautiful, so fit for its great purpose, that you may get from it all the blessing, all the benefit of its holy services. Do not think it enough to come occasionally to church; but come regularly, as often as the Sunday returns, and if you can, come twice. Take your part when you are here in God's worship; join in the prayers, join in the confession of sin, join in setting forth God's praise. Give ear,—give attentive ear to the reading and preaching of God's word. Do not draw back from the Lord's Table. Do not separate from your brethren in that highest, holiest act of our religion. Do not lightly put aside so great a means of spiritual health and refreshment.

Use, I say, to the full, one and all of the religious privileges which are now again open to you in this church; and I doubt not but that you will

soon find the blessedness of so doing, soon find it a pleasure and support to your soul to be engaged in God's holy worship.

And then, perhaps, the words I have chosen for a text to-day will occur ever and anon with fresh force to your minds. You will say,—some of you will surely say,—as you walk together, side by side with some like-minded companion to this fair sanctuary of the Lord,—fair in its own renewed beauty,—fair in its position above the shining river,—endeared to many of you by most tender memories, and bygone fellowship in sacred things once had with others within its walls. 'Oh, how amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of hosts. My soul hath a desire, and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God! Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House; they will be alway praising Thee!'

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